



## **Communication during the COVID-19 Pandemic? Tips and Tricks for the Environmental Education Community**

**A webinar hosted by the North American Association for Environmental Education and lead by Kristen Grimm, President of Spitfire Strategies**

**Link to the webinar recording:** <https://youtu.be/a6gObqjDxxl>

### **Hello environmental education field**

#### **Starting with the basics about communicating in a crisis**

Be mindful of the context and ecosystem you are communicating in. Everyone is communicating. There is misinformation. We are awash in information but not necessarily meaning. Focus on meaning making during these times. For example, there is a ton of information on going outdoors. What is the right answer? Who are the referential resources people should be following, e.g., Leave No Trace? Use your voice and position to help make meaning. What are you uniquely positioned to communicate? If they will listen to you re: hand washing because you are high trust group. OK. If not...seems like that is covered.

Set up a committee to get differing viewpoints including skills (HR, legal), as well as perspectives (different living styles, responsibilities, etc.). Meet often, even to check in. Focus on intel sharing not just decision making.

Be mindful that your audiences are reacting differently and may require different types of communications to achieve what you want. See what is playing out among your partners, e.g., the alarmists, the helpers, the down players, etc. They will opt in and out of information. Means don't let slack channels get taken over by those who like the minute by minute play. Be smart about setting up channels and norms for sharing.

Get clear on your purpose. You want to put everyone's health and safety first. You want to be a good partner. You want to be a source of relief not anxiety. You want to help parents through this national experiment of homeschooling. What else? Communicate this regularly.

You want to communicate clearly and in a timely fashion. Follow these three. Connect. Express that you know this is hard/scary/unprecedented. Explain how you are working to stay ahead of the impacts and minimize or respond well to them. Spread calm and a sense of control (for what is possible to control).

Short communications is ok. Focus on more often but not more clutter. Don't hide the lead, e.g., cancelling a conference. Don't need to warm up.

If you don't know an answer, communicate that you are thinking about it, what questions you are asking, who you are consulting, and when you'll have more. If they are asking: are they even thinking about this, you are behind the curve. Also don't be afraid to ask people what they think you should start thinking about now.

Keep your promises on when you'll share more. I follow the airplane rule.

If you can't share information, tell the why behind it, e.g., staff confidentiality around illnesses.

Remember people read silences, they make something out of it. Not usually good or helpful. Fill those gaps.

Don't make sweeping statements that unnecessarily stigmatize. E.g., everyone should stay home. Everyone should go to their backyard (not everyone has a backyard.)

Moving to EE specific advice and responding to pre-questions asked

### **Now (response period)**

Organizationally

Purpose in an immediate crisis is to be someone people can trust and count on.

Give staff space and time to process. Set deliberate purpose for gatherings so people know when it is sharing and when it is problem solving.

Care, comfort and compassion for your team and your partners. You don't know the future. You know that you are in this together and will do all you can for each other.

Translate what different things mean, e.g., what might stimulus mean for you?  
What might schools doing make up work over the summer mean for you?

For partners...how can you pivot programs and experiences they relied on you for.  
If you can't do you have ideas to fill the gaps (don't leave them holding the time)

For people who look at you as a trusted org...how to safely go outside.

If you want to differentiate what EE offerings you have amidst a lot of competing resources...can you make it geographically relevant, e.g., hydrangeas. Can you make it time relevant, e.g., first day of spring came two days early? What does this mean? Tailor for specific kind of parents, e.g., the non-outdoor parent anyway; dads looking to contribute.

For your future...communicate what you are doing and why so people don't read into decisions and draw the wrong conclusions, e.g., going on hiatus or worse layoffs. Why. Be people centered in these announcements.

For funders/supporters...if they ask what you need...have an answer. Consider what you might need beyond resources. Also consider what you might do for them. They are all cooped up. Can you use your content to create a staff bonding experience around nature from stay at home environments?

Get creative about how communicating what you love doing. Get inspired by authors who are reading their books, Alvin Ailey dancers coordinating a dance via group videos. What can you do together that still brings to life the magic of EE but in a different format? Can you do videos and see the world as your classroom? Can you facetime and live stream? Can you create a 10am life goes on moment in the day where we check out what flowers are popping, babies hatching, etc.

A word about humor...careful. There is gallows humor. I think we have seen that in last 24-hour news cycle. Encourage self-deprecating humor. Where has nature humbled you? Where are you learning in funny ways you can share?

Use all the tech available to you and use good teaching/engagement methods. Zoom you have chats, can go into small rooms etc. Don't lose the community building like ice breakers. Use chat. Use live surveys, they have scary things I can't promote but decide for yourself. Lots of people innovating (e.g., Ted) go see what they are up to and what might work for you. Consider different formats for those who are internet constrained. Can you text lessons? Can you email something.

Everything doesn't have to be video. Can you start a seeds in letters movement that is an EE opp and a chance to be in touch with people who might be getting restless?

Tons of resources out there helping people get good at this.

## Teaching & Learning

- [Accessible Teaching in the Time of COVID-19](#)
- [Distance Learning Tips](#)
- [Resources for Moving Dance-Based Pedagogy Online](#)
- [Remote Teaching Resources](#)
- [Teaching Theatre Online: A Shift in Pedagogy Amidst Coronavirus Outbreak](#)
- [Resources for Teaching Online: Open Source Resources for Performance-Related Disciplines](#) (Association for Theatre in Higher Education)
- [Teaching Theatre Thru Remote Learning](#) Facebook Group
- ["Please do a bad job of putting your course online"](#) (Rebecca Barrett-Fox)
- [Resources for Moving Production Courses Online in Case of an Emergency](#)
- [Teaching Remote Music Lessons: The Best Services and Settings to Use \(with step-by-step instructions\)](#) (Eric Heidbreder)
- [Companies Offering Free or Discounted Educator Resources](#)
- [Free Online Music Theory Teaching Platform for Affected Schools](#) (uttheory.com)
- [Video Library for Dance Educators](#)
- [Clark Hulings Fund ECampus](#)
- [Amplifier](#)
- [How To Host Music Lessons Online](#)
- [Teaching Music Online](#)
- A webinar from Vimeo on hosting virtual events: [How to plan a virtual event: Vimeo's live production experts tell all](#)
- Facebook live streamed watch parties: [FB watch parties](#)

Figure out where the people you want to engage are gathering online, e.g., Facebook groups. There is one by a home-schooling maven Surviving Homeschool by Denise Bernard. You can look for good gathering spots and influencers using ad tools. This will give you the ability to set demographics, topics, geographies. You can find groups, influencers, etc. Also consider the mommy blogs. Sent Judy top 50 of these. If you remember epi pen scandal of few years ago you've witnessed mom bloggers.

Consider doing fun stuff socially with the local weather people. Who is already engaging in social media that is in front of people you want to engage with?

Who is looking for content and you can plug in.? Someone asked about reaching urban families. Think about who is set up to do this, e.g., Museum of natural history. And they need content. Can you partner up?

Remember people doing your programs are most influential to their peers. Make requests to share experiences online with networks. Best way to build rapport with new audiences.

Last, don't duplicate already available content. If you have magic to add, do. But build off of what is out there, e.g., Children and Nature Network has physician voices on healing power of nature. Use don't recreate.

### **As a field**

#### **Relevance and timeliness...what problem are you the solution for?**

Jobs...are you keeping people employed

Novel education times...do you have skills and resources with many kids out of school for months?

Healing...nature as healer/resiliency builder...do you have ideas about how to turn education into healing for a nation that needs this? Good tips for going outside safely?

Note: as you come up with ways to talk about above. Share with each other. You don't need unique language to describe how you as a field can help at this time.

**Find white space**...people awash in resources but have actually never planned a week of learning. Do you have that expertise to offer? One lesson relevant for multiple grades. If you can position yourself here, do.

Note: same point about messaging as a collective.

Are there moments of attention, you as a field want to get behind? What does it mean to have Earth Day's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary fall in the middle of this? Is it a field opportunity? Are people home? Are they back out and about?

### **Then (recovery and beyond)**

Hard to imagine but this will end. Maybe 2 months, maybe 18 months. We will have changed as a nation.

**Organizationally**...how are you changing to meet the times? Could be philosophy of how you educate, could be organizationally how you do your work, could be how you do it, e.g., more virtual elements. You'll want to communicate how you are growing as an organization. Consider story types, lessons learned, and performance stories.

### **As a field**

Environment will still be important, as will stewarding it well. Will we as a society be more likely to consider things like climate change or shut down and want to ignore? Plan for both scenarios.

What's your vision for a post-pandemic future? Get clear on this while you have time and be ready to communicate. This is collective messaging. Don't be a cacophony here. If you want to focus on EE as healing, then all get behind it.

Is there a teachable moment from this? What did we learn from the pandemic that we are uniquely suited to help us?

Can you do things collectively to gain attention and talk about your value, e.g., creek week...something you might all do.

The Trough by Judy Brown

There is a trough in waves,  
a low spot  
where horizon disappears  
and only sky  
and water  
are our company.  
And there we lose our way  
unless  
we rest, knowing the wave will bring us  
to its crest again.  
There we may drown  
if we let fear  
hold us in its grip and shake us  
side to side,  
and leave us flailing, torn, disoriented.  
But if we rest there  
in the trough,  
in silence,

being in the low part of the wave,  
keeping our energy and  
noticing the shape of things,  
the flow,  
then time alone  
will bring us to another  
place  
where we can see  
horizon, see land again,  
regain our sense  
of where  
we are,  
and where we need to swim.