

# Evolving Outreach: How Environmental Communication and Outreach Must Change with its Audience



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## Background

- Stormwater runoff is the #1 cause of water pollution in urban areas, contaminating seafood and drinking water, and causing habitat loss and biodiversity loss.
- Programs across the country provides cheap/free private green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) like rain gardens and cisterns (Fig 1) to homeowners as solutions for slowing down and filtering pollutants out of urban stormwater runoff.
- Creating appealing environmental messaging is important in gaining participants in the program and installing more GSI.



Figure 1:  
An example of GSI: a rain garden retaining stormwater after a large storm.

## Research Questions

- What are the opportunities and barriers for GSI incentive programs in community outreach?
- Which motivators are most successful in garnering support for GSI installations?

## Internship and Methods

- Canvassed Seattle neighborhoods as a RainWise Outreach intern.
- Conducted a content analysis of 4 GSI incentive program's outreach material: brochures and mailers (Fig 2).
- Interviewed GSI outreach teams in WA. state (Fig 4)
- Analysis of RainWise Facebook follower likes and engagements to determine audience content preference (Fig 3)

## Results

- Programs that have aged and captured their "pro-environment" audience early on benefitted from **shifting messaging from collective benefits to personal benefits.**
- Audiences have an interest in **community building and education: two areas of opportunity** to garner support for GSI (Fig 3) (Fig 4).
- Lack of funding presents barriers** for many outreach teams.
- Social proof** is a persuasive principle commonly and successfully **used to motivate audiences** to support GSI (Fig 2).



Figure 2 (Above): Pictures used in brochures and mailers from Whatcom County's Homeowner Incentive Program (HIP).

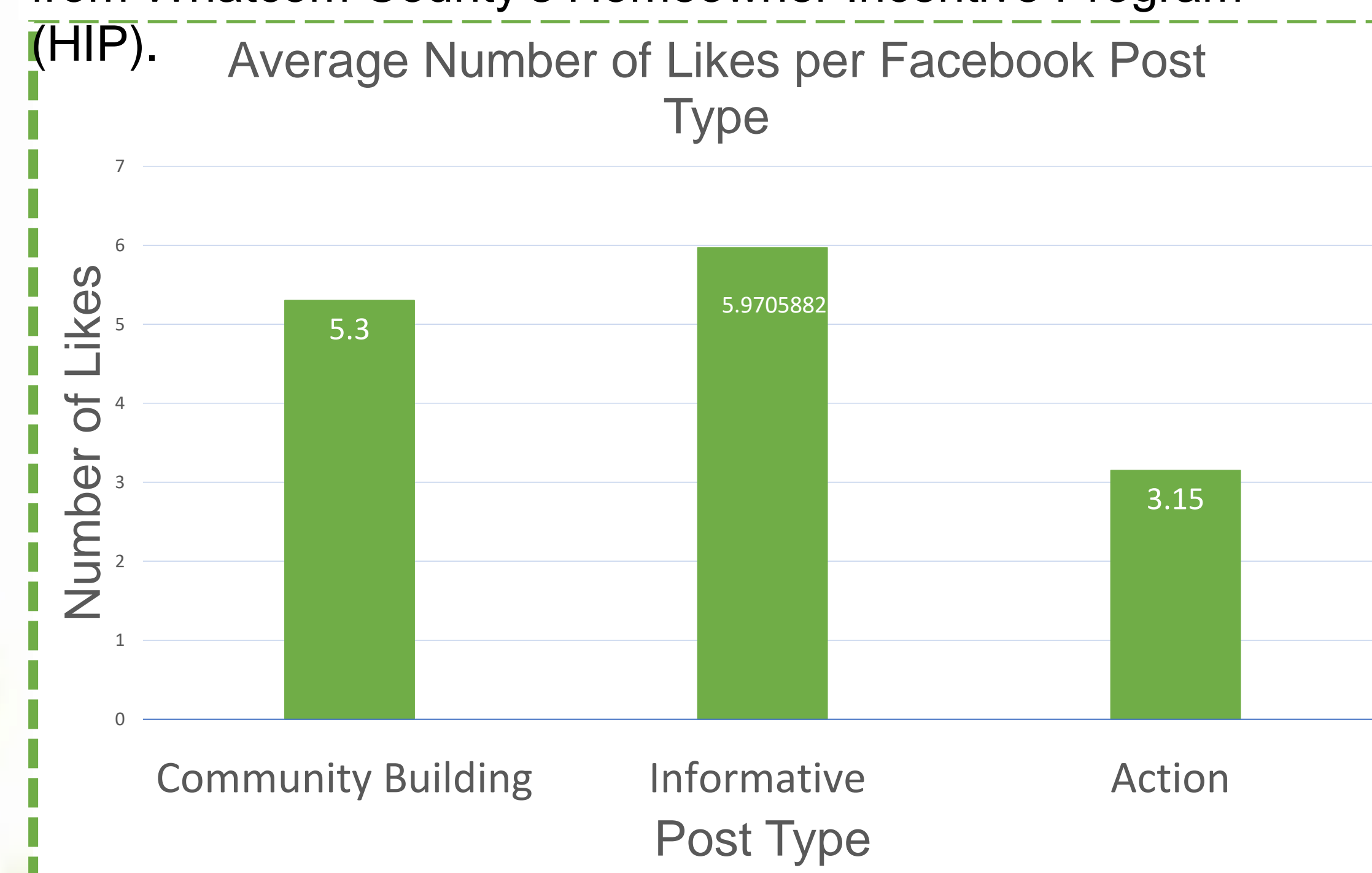


Figure 3: (Above) A bar graph showing which RainWise Facebook posts types are most liked by followers. This reinforces the points about social proof and community building mentioned in interviews.

## Results Cont.

### Opportunities

**Social Proof –**  
"People are more likely to show interest if...their neighbor has an installation."

**Community Building- One organization connected with people at neighborhood "Night Out" parties**

### Barriers

**Funding- "[Redacted] will not be funding us in the future...we're unsure about the future of the program."**

**Lack of Funding:" Its just me [on the outreach team]...research is a pending task on my list."**

Figure 4: (Above) Significant quotes from some of my interviewees that demonstrate common themes that were brought up more than once.

## Significance

- We now know that environmental communication cannot remain static and that a number of appeals can be used to garner support based on the age of the program and the audience it serves.
- Social acceptance and community building around environmental programs and movements will help normalize sustainability of all kinds to help solve climate change

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to my friends and family who supported me, as well as my site supervisor, my faculty advisor, and my capstone cohort for their knowledge and advice.