How to Crush Climate Change Communication

Paige Millham*, Program on the Environment, University of Washington
Host Organization: King County Emergency Management
Site Supervisor: Jared Schneider, EM Program Manager - Mitigation, King County
Faculty Advisor: Ann Bostrom, Evans School of Policy & Governance, University of Washington

PROGRAM ON THE ENVIRONMENT

W @pmillham09

King County

Context & Background

o Failed climate change communication is an issue that has many detrimental effects on both people and the environment.

o King County's project partners, the people who write the grant applications for and implement projects to better the wellbeing of the county, lack accessibility to the convincing climate related data relevant to their national grant applications.

o Making climate data available clearly and concisely for project partners is difficult due to the diversity of climate related issues and potential projects.

o Thus, my project aims to increase the likelihood King County is granted the funding by making local climate change data and background information accessible through an education plan.

Research Question

What are the best practices to integrate climate change information into education plans for project partners in King County?

Internship/Methods

Internship:
o Created a climate change education plan for King County's project partners to make climate data more accessible

o Recorded a presentation of the education plan for future seminars & provided related resources
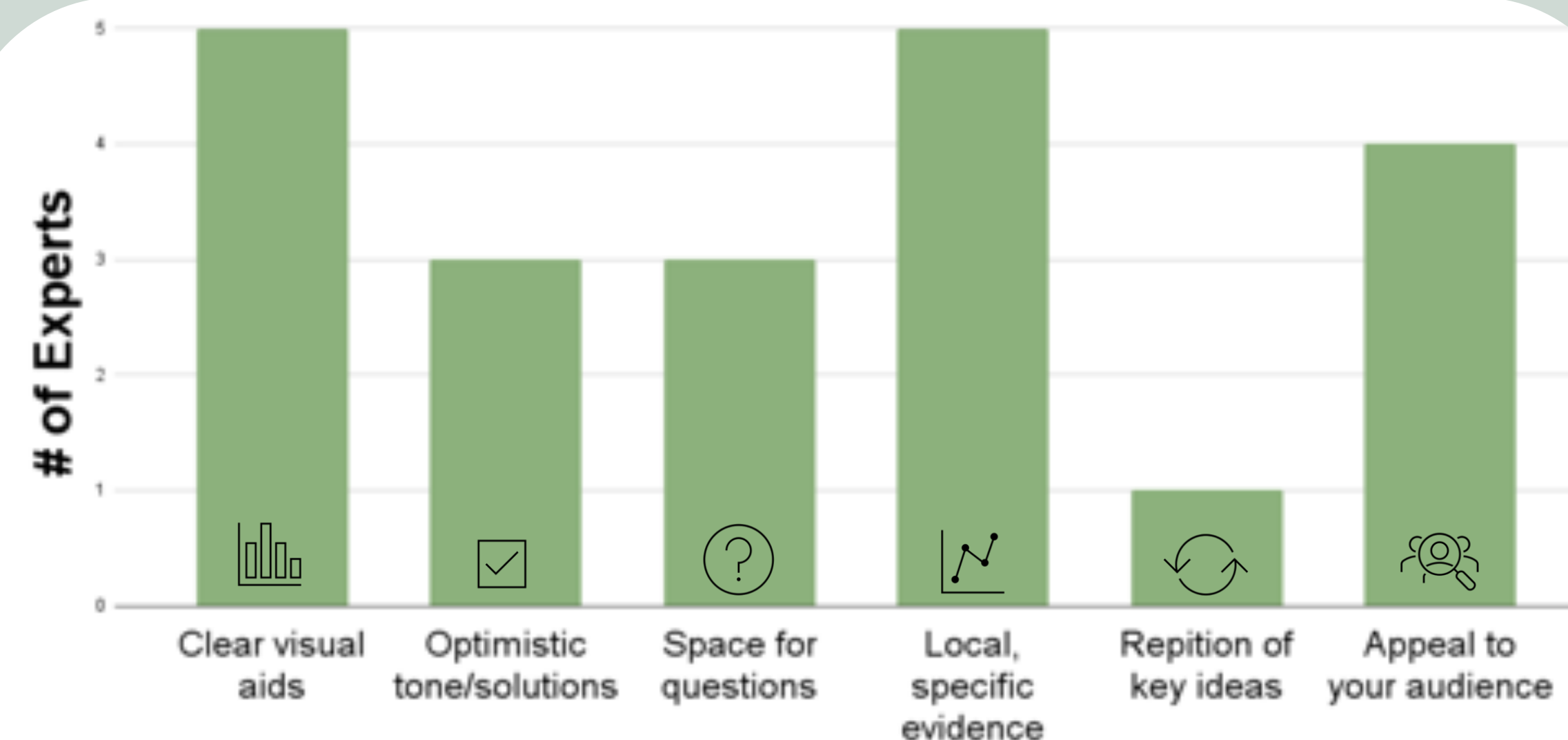
Research:
o Interviewed 5 climate change experts about the most effective climate communication methods

o Conducted a literary analysis on relevant climate change communication literature

Fig. 1: I worked in King County's Emergency Management office in Renton, WA.

Results

The expert interviews provided the most compelling results:

Key Themes Experts Emphasized Necessary

Figure 2: When collecting data from five expert interviews, 6 key themes were mentioned.

Quotes from Climate Change Experts

"Strong visuals can be extremely potent when communicating about climate change"

"Give me a reason to hope, give me a pathway to enact change"

"A lot of the productive work in these workshops come from the discussions and time to ask questions after the presentation"

"Avoid jargon, have simple graphics, relatable analogies, and grounding data in as much locally relevant information as possible.."

"People can generally hold three things in their head... boil your key points to be summarized in three points"

"Innovate a form of communication by understanding your audience, their reactions, and what the ultimate goal is"

The literary review discussed many of the same ideas as the expert interviews. The primary overlap of key ideas is demonstrated:

Major Expert Responses   VS.   Major Literary Conclusions

Repeat key messages

Space for questions

Appeal to audience

Specific, local evidence

Optimistic tone & provide solutions

Clear, simple visual aids
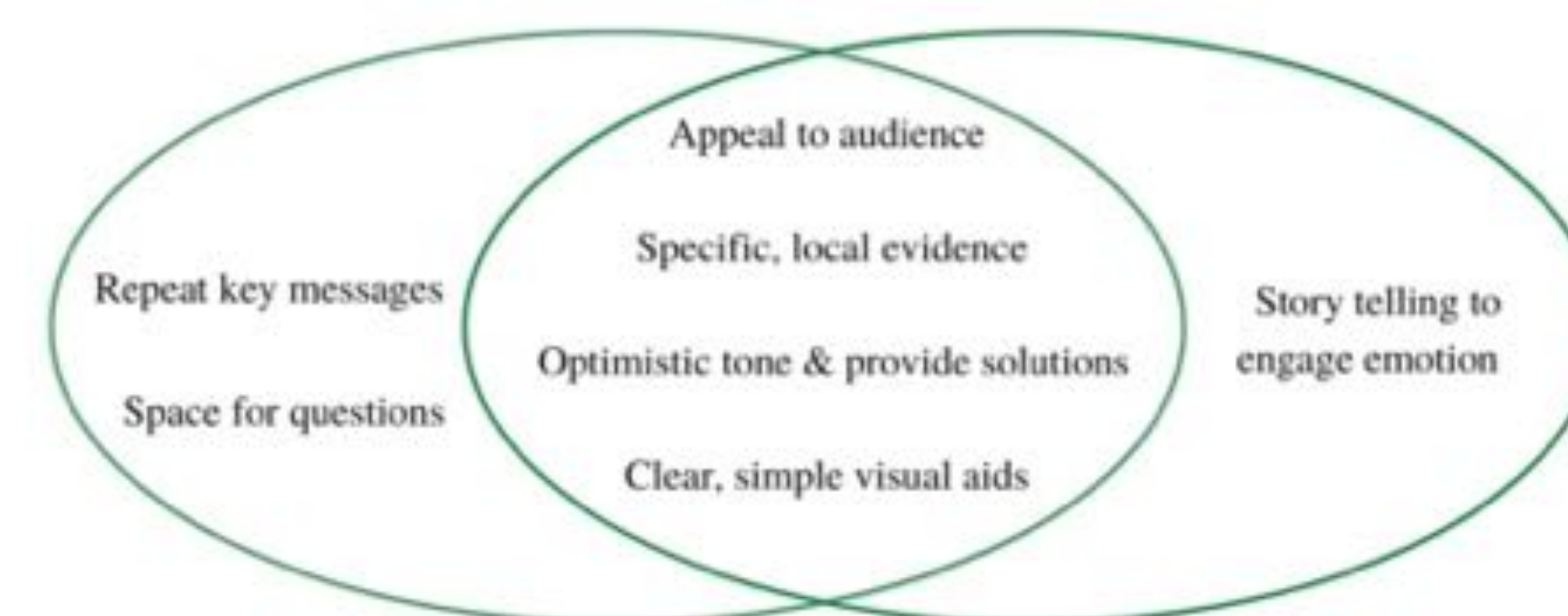
Story telling to engage emotion

Fig. 3: This figure represents the major ideas each method of research produced. It should be noted that there were many other solutions mentioned, these are just the most relevant to the project.

Key Findings

▪ Clear Visual Aids

☑ Optimistic Tone & Solutions

? Space for Questions

Local, Specific Evidence

Repeat Key Ideas

Appeal to Audience

These findings of the best practices of climate communication were used to develop the education plan presented to project partners.

Significance

The education plan includes all key findings from my research.

Climate Change Education Plan Structure

Major Risks of Climate Change

Severe Weather — Water-Related Risks — Fire-Related Risks

Extreme Heat & Heat Waves — Droughts — Wildfires

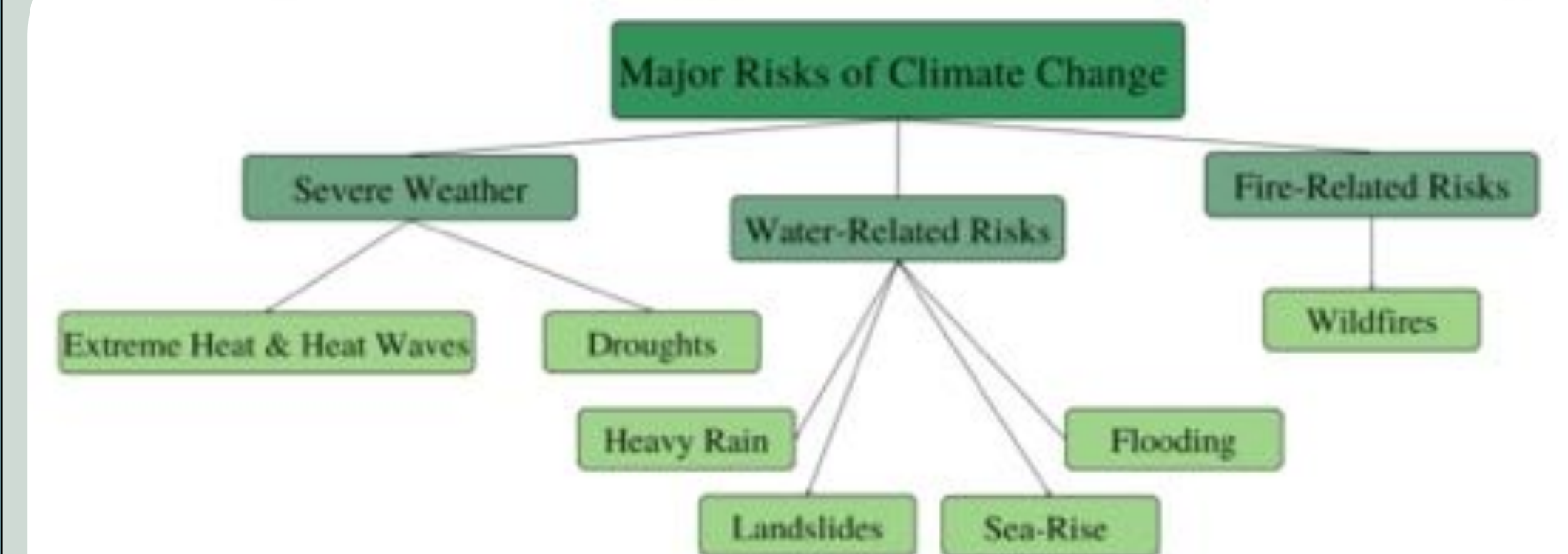Heavy Rain — Flooding

Landslides — Sea-Rise

Fig. 4: The diagram above represents the structure of the climate change education plan. Within each of these sections and subsections, the best practices of climate change communication were incorporated.

o This project effectively summarizes the current methods of climate change communication and identifies areas of growth for climate education in King County in the years to come.

o The accessible climate data resource will be used in the future, which will continue to increase the likelihood of receive funding for projects that benefit the wellbeing of people and the planet.

o Looking forward, this project is a small steppingstone for the government to increase climate crisis education, specifically its risks and solutions. As climate change communication increases, monetary funding, community efforts, and policy changes will follow, helping to combat a multitude of global issues.

Acknowledgements