

Graphing Learners

Developing a Suite of Programs: Part 2



photo: Will Husby

By Sue Ellen Fast

A simple graph can help you develop programs that lead learners on towards becoming leaders.

There's a big difference between planning an individual program and planning a suite of them. Interpreters can use various resources, procedures and even forms to help plan an individual program. But for those responsible for a suite of programs, it's not so easy. Sure, there are some useful comprehensive management models such as ANZECC and 5-M, but what I'd like to share here is a simple way to put a suite of programs into perspective. I suggest that you plot your programs on a graph.

I hear some of you thinking, *Gosh, what a linear thinker. Where's the creativity in that?* Ours is a complex profession. We need the skills of the artist, storyteller, ecologist and historian. And we need various other skills too, such as setting objectives linked to agency mission, responding to the market, and understanding audiences in terms of prior knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. This is where the graph fits in.

To represent audiences, let's use the time-honoured progression of awareness, appreciation, understanding and action (AAUA model). I added leadership long ago and have used these as audience categories for years when planning services. They are

much easier to relate to agency goals than other audience categories such as boomers or campers. Arranged in a continuum, they imply a flow or movement towards the mission. Here I mean the vision or mandate or main goal—the reason the agency exists. This developmental approach is consistent with current education theory; take Bloom's Taxonomy, for example. Recent environmental literacy, experiential education, and education for stewardship and sustainability models usually contain aspects beyond awareness and simple message transferral.

Recently Will Husby and I developed the AAUA progression of learner audiences a bit more into the Stewardship Scale introduced in the last issue (*InterpScan* 31:1). Developing a suite of programs for the range of these audiences results in a more strategic and effective suite of programs, in my experience. Or if science literacy is your mission rather than stewardship, or community engagement in local history, or anything else, you can still use this approach. Here are some benefits beyond the obvious:

- Participation in the advanced level programs is evidence that you are

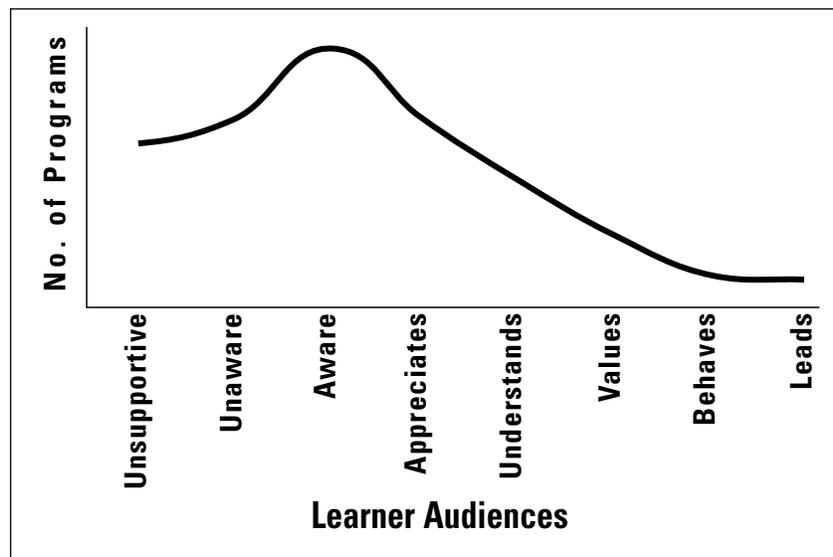
contributing toward the agency's mission.

- When upper management asks, "Why these programs and not others?", you have a ready explanation, at least for the framework of your program suite.
- Community involvement and development are fostered as some people return again and again, others flow in and out at levels that suit them, and a supporting network of instructors and other collaborators develops.
- The trickle of volunteers, board members and other graduates from the leadership end of the pipe replenishes and supports the network.
- The concepts of progress and constant improvement colour the culture of your workplace.

To make the graph, we flip the stewardship scale onto its side to become the x axis (across). When you are looking for patterns across a range of anything, graphs are the way to go. Then if the y axis (vertical) becomes number of programs, you can plot your suite of programs and create a graph.

Take a look below. Here's a rough example based on an urban nature centre that I worked at many years ago. Stewardship of the urban natural environment was part of its mission.

First, the graph shows that learn-



ing opportunities were offered across the entire range of audiences. Starting from the left, it's also clear that most programs were offered at the awareness level. I think of these awareness-level offerings as the intake for the progression, as if it were a pipe drawing in fresh water.

Then you can see that fewer and fewer programs were offered further along the range. This was partly because there were fewer customers at these audience levels, and also because these programs often required extra preparation and expertise on the part of the program leaders, as in contracted instructors or other experts.

To illustrate, here are just a few examples of programs offered for the various audience levels from same nature centre:

Unsupportive and Unaware

- mass media
- guest speaking

Awareness

- Nature Detectives school program
- Bird Seed N Feed special event
- public drop-in visitors

Appreciation

- family nature quest to Wagner Bog
- Winter Solstice mini-event

Understanding

- basic decoy carving course
- family birdhouse building

Values

- junior field naturalists club
- raptor course (CWS biologist)

Behaves

- ecology camp projects
- nature photography course

Leadership

- Joseph Cornell teacher workshop
- volunteer training

Note that the examples don't always match neatly with a single audience level. That's OK; it's the perspective that's important. There were non-personal services too that one could also place on the graph, such as exhibits, the books in the gift

shop, a bulletin board for natural history society outings and other related extension opportunities, etc. But I'm sure you've got the picture.

Another organization's graph might look quite different. For example, a river conservancy might offer school programs and workshops for acreage landowners. Their graph might look something like the one below:

Say you have inherited a slate of existing programs with a new job. Chances are

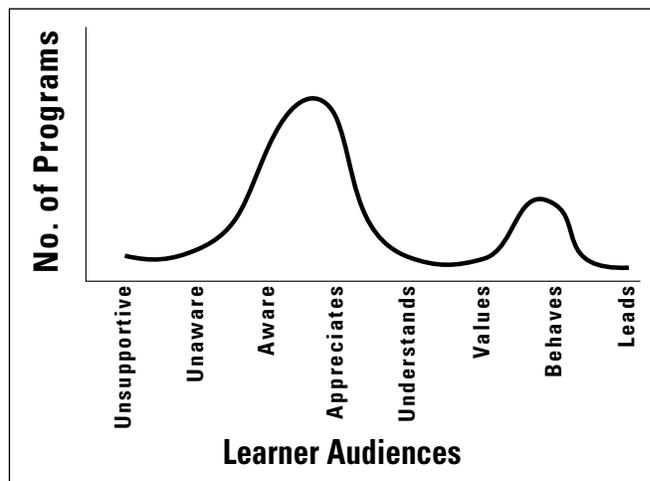
good that these programs are more than a miscellaneous collection of survivors. How do they relate to each other? Sketch out a rough graph.

Can participants progress, or are there gaps? Of course learning isn't a linear process and it's unlikely that any individual person would move smoothly all the way along, but the population of learners should have a current within it. Where would the programs of other local organizations be on the graph? Perhaps your programs are concentrated in the ideal audience niches, and you will see cross-promotion or even partnership possibilities. I would suggest that connecting the dots with a few more programs across the range could bring more of the benefits listed above.

Or maybe a totally new suite of programs is in the works. Will you make room for a few skills workshops or hands-on projects for advanced audiences, even though these will take more time and expertise and attendance may be low? A handful of leaders may be more valuable to your organization than a thousand attendees at the awareness level. Or if the leadership end of the scale becomes your program focus, where will your learners come from? You

may need to offer some awareness programs to generate participation at the other levels, just as a gymnastics club needs a large recreational component in order to generate a few elite athletes.

If you work for a municipality or other agency close to the taxpayer, you might want to think about your programs in terms of access to services. Perhaps you offer something for every age from preschooler to senior, and for every financial situation from



free programs to high-revenue eco-tours. Do you have something for learners at each level of the stewardship scale too?

It would be interesting to know if anyone out there has used this graph or something like it to evaluate contributions of a program suite to agency mission. Note that the graph shares an x-axis with Merriman's Money-Mission Matrix on page 23. I assume there are many other useful graphs, matrices and models that interpreters and educators are using. I hope that interested readers will contact me to share these tools in these pages.

So sprinkle those tasty awareness programs at the distant intake end of the flow, and keep those people coming back through other programs further along. Learners will leave and join the flow, and some will eventually emerge from the leadership end to help carry the flag on towards your mission. Enjoy the swim!

Some Sources

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