



Do Diligence Sounding Board Report

To: Interested Parties

From: Eric Eckl, Water Words That Work, LLC

Re: Review of a Clean Water Action Fundraising Webpage

Date: 02/10/2010

Water Words That Work, LLC is preparing to launch a new market research service -- tentatively titled the "Do Diligence Sounding Board" -- for nature protection and pollution control organizations to use to evaluate marketing materials and messages.

The purpose of this forthcoming service is to allow you to **quickly** and **affordably** pre-test materials *before* they are final -- giving you an opportunity to improve your piece before you release it into the wild. Once the service launches, Water Words That Work, LLC will provide DDSB feedback to our clients in complete confidence.

As part of our field trials for this service, we tested 8 fundraising webpages and emails from nonprofit organizations seeking financial support for water-related work.

This report summarizes what two dozen "everyday citizens have to say about the "Why Your Support Matters" page on Clean Water Action's website:

<http://www.cleanwateraction.org/page/why-your-support-matters>

The Do Diligence Sounding Board provides feedback that you can use to sharpen your fundraising message -- finding your way to the words and pictures that successfully evoke a charitable response. However, favorable feedback does not guarantee fundraising success, and negative feedback does not guarantee failure, for the following reasons:

- This report provides insight into the *first impression* that your fundraising message makes. Those who already have an impression of your organization already may react differently.
- You are *competing* for donors' generosity against other good causes, as well as the events that occur in their lives and in the world.

- A powerful message is only one part of a fundraising effort. Successful fundraising also requires regular effort, enough suitable prospects, regular effort, a good reputation, regular effort, and a good system for delivering your message and processing the gifts.

By the Numbers

Overall, this page scored slightly below the average of the 8 pieces. The piece earned high marks for "important to society" and "a problem that has affected me or someone I care about," but low marks for "clear goal that it is raising money to achieve" and "I understand how the organization will use the donations it receives."

Statement	1-Strongly Disagree	2-Somewhat Disagree	3-Somewhat Agree	4-Strongly Agree	Average for this Piece	Average for similar pieces
This group is trying to solve a problem that is important to society	0	0	11	13	3.54	3.45
This group is trying to solve a problem that has affected me or someone I care about	3	3	11	7	2.92	2.46
This organization will use donations to help end the suffering of people or animals	2	2	19	1	2.79	3.03
This organization will use donations to correct some kind of injustice	5	7	10	2	2.38	2.63
This organization will use	1	7	15	1	2.67	2.34

donations to help children						
The group has a clear goal that it is raising money to achieve	5	4	8	7	2.71	3.32
I understand how the organization will use the donations it receives	5	6	10	2	2.42	2.83
I am confident that this group can make a difference if it reaches its goal	3	8	7	6	2.67	2.95
I am confident that others are supporting the group's work	2	2	12	8	3.08	3.06
If the group doesn't reach its goal soon, it may be too late	6	13	4	1	2.00	2.59
Overall Average					2.72	2.86

Key Findings

Question	Yes	No
Does the work of this organization fit your own personal definition of a "good cause?"	22	2

Question: "Please elaborate on your answer to the previous question:"

They answered like this:

- "Obviously it's incredibly important to keep our water clean, for children to remain healthy and for our future in general".
- "Clean water affects literally everyone and everything".
- "I tend to contribute to organizations who have environmental missions, and I additionally like groups with a grassroots component".
- "I guess clean water is good but I don't really know what they do".
- "A good cause is oftentimes one that benefits the community at large. If a good cause can benefit both people and the environment, then it is especially appealing to me".
- "They seem to operate as a non-profit, with the goal of environmental protection. That's a good cause".
- "Well every person would like clean water"
- "It is an advocacy organization that does not depend on grants, but rather the donations of its members. Since it promotes the "common good" (through advocating for clean water) I would say it is a good cause".
- "Clean water is a necessity for mankind everywhere. We need to find ways to ensure safe water for our existence".
- "I belong to Clean Water Action".
- "This is an organization designed specifically with us as "the people" in mind, not the government. Meaning we are all a part of the decision making process. Each of us have a say so in how to improve our own communities".
- "Well they do positive work for the environment which is always a good thing'.
- "They are helping others by persuading politicians to pass clean water legislation".
- "Clean water is very important. They are on the right track. It seems like our water is getting polluted more and more everyday".
- "They are lobbying their legislators so that they can get clean water for their communities".
- "They seem to be trying to stay grounded by only taking donations from individuals".
- "This is really close. Fifty fifty. Clean water is good for everybody, but I highly doubt I would contribute to this group. Without some kind of facts to back up the work that they're doing their credibility is close to zero. The cause of clean water is a good cause but I'm not sure that donating to this group would be a good way to address that issue".
- "A good cause" is something that contributes to the well-being of a large number of people, in my view. Clean water and a healthy environment are certainly beneficial to the masses, and Clean Water Action's methods of grassroots work further engage the community in its endeavors".
- "I would agree that from the information seen, this group does seem to be fighting for a 'good' cause, as the waterways that are around us support in some way all of the life around us. From the implications of what was said, it seems as though they are trying to save those waterways which are hurt by commercial and personal abuse".
- "There large membership shows the public officials that they have a meaningful voice and should not be ignored, also they work on donations so its all ran by the people that support it, not sucked off of the government grants"
- "Yes because it motivates democracy and seeks benefits for the whole of society".

- "Everyone benefits from a healthy environment, and proper legislation is at the basis to achieving those goals".
- "Of course it's a good cause. Water is one of the most fundamental human needs, and keeping it clean is a noble pursuit".

Their Initial Reaction

Question: "Pick one word that summarizes the feeling this piece evokes in you:"

They answered:

- "Worthwhile"
- "importance"
- "Energized"
- "disinterest"
- "fundraising"
- "interest"
- "professional"
- "solidarity"
- "contributions"
- "energized"
- "safety"
- "calm"
- "environment"
- "respect"
- "Interesting"
- "respect"
- "real"
- "mistrust"
- "community"
- "Justice"
- "hope"
- "grassroot"
- "restrictive"
- "useful"

Your Message in Their Words, Part I

Question: "In your own words, please describe the work of this organization:"

They answered like this:

- "Keeping our water clean, and fighting for stricter laws regarding water treatment and similar fields".
- "Keeping water clean".
- "Clean Water Action is a grassroots environmental group who puts a focus on clean water and fostering democracy"

- "I cant really tell. Something about clean water, but I cant tell where or how".
- "Clean Water Action is a non-profit, grassroots organization promoting healthy ecosystems, communities, and local economies. The organization relies primarily on financial support from its member base, allowing it to act more independently than it might with funding from other sources".
- "This Clean Water group works as a lobbyist group to influence political leaders".
- "this organization is working towards clean water"
- "This organization is an advocacy group that promotes clean water".
- "This is a group that is focused on seeing to it that we have clean water. They are doing this by raising their own funds to give the group a certain autonomy".
- "Clean Water action is a grassroots lobbying group on environmental issues".
- "Clean Water Action is an environmental company that is there to make sure our communities are the safest possible".
- "it's an grassroots environmental group".
- "working to improve the environment"
- "This organization is a clean water advocacy/lobbying group".
- "The organization is promoting clean water".
- "They are a clean water advocacy group".
- "Help protect the environment through legislation. But to remain free from coporate influence".
- "It looks like they're member driven. They take donations from members, and members sign petitions, organize drives etc. The ad says that donating to the group will give them more clout but its not clear from the ad just what exactly that clout wil allow them to do".
- "Clean Water Action is a grassroots environmental organization that strives to influence local and national policy".
- "Clean Water Action participates heavily in trying to formulate better state and local laws to protect local bodies of water that its members live in. Other then this, the page displayed tells me nothing about how they actually accomplish this goal, but rather says that they receive money from their volunteers so that they can make their own policies instead of being sponsored by major organizations".
- "they work to better the environment by talking to public officials".
- "Is dedicated to making democracy though it's grassroot efforts for the creation of policies that help and benefit both people and the environment".
- "Is a grassroots environmental organization, attempting to shape policies at the federal and local level for healthy environments".
- "Keeping water clean for consumption and use".

Your Message in Their Words, Part II

Question: "In your own words, please describe the people or animals this group is trying to help?"

They answered like this:

- "Children, all animals that may be affected by pollution dumping and similar things, and adults and basically everyone would be affected by this".
- "Everyone who drinks water, bathes in it, is near it, literally everyone".
- "All people by protecting the environment".
- "Fish in contaminated lakes maybe? I'm not sure".
- "The people the organization is trying to help includes the broader community (which in this case ultimately includes children). Because we all drink and use water, we are all affected by the cleanliness of that water".
"The animals the organization is trying to help include waterfowl, micro organisms, and any other creatures that make up the ecosystem of our waterways and byways".
- "They're trying to help society as a whole by making sure we don't have polluted water".
- "Its trying to help clean water for both people and animals".
- "I think that the group being helped is the local community by supporting clean water legislation. It is not very clear".
- "I think these people are trying to help on a large scale, to ensure that there is safe water for humans, and animals that need it".
- "Everyone suffers when the environment is degraded".
- "This group is designed to help all of us. Both people and family will greatly benefit from this clean water source. No matter the age of the individual this is a very important part of all of our lives".
- "I guess, everyone, the website didn't really explain alot but by the name alone Clear water, I can assume they help everyone?"
- "I guess everyone?"
- "It is trying to help the people in their community have clean water".
- "The group is trying to help everyone since we all need water. Without clean water the world would be nothing".
- "They are trying to help people in their community".
- "Their efforts are to help protect the environment. Their efforts at best will be indirect. But will eventually help all people and animals".
- "Its really not clear from the ad. Clean water helps everybody who gets access to it. The ad doesn't really emphasize who specifically they're trying to help or how specifically they're trying to help them".
"They mention something about a national campaign buried over at the bottom of the (visually distracting) left sidebar, but that doesn't really say much. It's not clear from this ad".
- "Clean Water Action's work really impacts everyone and every animal. The environment is something we all share. At the same time, its work probably has a stronger impact on impoverished communities, as they are more likely to be dealing with environmental chaos and dirty water".
- "This group is trying to help everyone who uses local waterways for commercial and recreational use, along with those who enjoy the aesthetic pleasures. Clean Water Action also seems to be trying to improve the quality of life in these waterways from the vertebrates to invertebrates".
- "all people and animals indirectly by helping the environment in general"

- "It is trying to help society in general and that involves every member of society and every part of the environment".
- "It is trying to help us all by providing a better environment for everyone".
- "Anyone and any animal that would use or employ water, which is almost every living thing".

Shop Talk vs. Plain English

Question: "Imagine that your friends, coworkers, or family member are looking at the piece themselves. If there are any words or phrases that might be difficult for them, please share them below:"

They answered like this:

- "I don't think there are any".
- "It's more a matter of what the piece doesn't say, rather than what it does say. At no point does it mention specifics about the organization's initiatives or how the money will be used. I know my colleagues would want to learn more before donating money".
- "There could be some people who don't really know what the term 'grassroots' really means".
- "none"
- "n/a"
- "How and when are they going to help promote clean water?"
- "Nobody that I know would support this group. Its not that the language is difficult, its just that its very vague".
- "All wording is simplistic yet elegant and conveys the message they are trying to get across well".
- "they don't exactly tell what they are doing to help the environment, they just generally tell that they are, and there are alot of them. and they voice there opinions to public officials"
- "It doesn't state clear what their efforts are and what the donations are used for, there are no examples of solutions they have come up with".
- "no difficult words or phrases noted"

Strengths of the Piece

Question: " In your opinion, what is the strongest or most compelling thing about this piece?"

They answered like this:

- "Just the importance of it all, and how it affects literally everyone who drinks water".
- "That water is important to every living thing and if we don't keep it clean we all have to suffer the consequences".
- "It is clear that the money that people donate are the most important aspect of fundraising for this organization. It compels people to help out, because they know their donation will matter".
- "The logo is nice".

- "There seems to be passion within the organization to do good. I'm just not sure what the specifics of that "good" are. From the organization's name I gather that it promotes clean water somehow. But I don't know much more from that, based on the piece".
- "I know our waterways are polluted, but that's because I'm totally interested in the environment. This piece is only compelling to me because it's an issue important to me".
- "Its so professional that it looks like a very legitimate organization"
- "I honestly don't find anything very compelling. It looks hastily written".
- "The fact that they raise their own money and don't take donations which could make them somewhat indebted to large organizations or government agencies which might have alternate agendas".
- "mentioning number of members"
- "mentioning they don't accept corporate donations or grants"
- "How it involves the people of the community in the decision making".
- "That they are confident that they will achieve their goal, they are compassionate".
- "nothing"
- "It is pretty vague. It is not very compelling".
- "That they say millions of people have already donated".
- "It is not a very compelling piece. It is too vague".
- "They have good support from a large number off people. And are able to pursue their goals not some companies goals".
- "The color swatches are nice. They work well together. Honestly, that's about it. This is not a good ad".
- "I think the strongest thing about this piece is the emphasis on the grassroots effort. Clean Water Action presents itself as not some bureaucratic, untouchable organization, but instead as an organization of the people".
- "That there are over a million members that belong to this group".
- "there group has one million members and growing strong"
- "The implication of their grassroot identity means a lot to society when they hear that".
- "That the organization relies exclusively on it's members for donations".
- "Just it's general concern".

Weaknesses of the Piece

Question: "In your opinion, what is the weakest thing about this piece?"

They answered like this:

- "Honestly nothing really".
- "Nothing weak".
- "It doesn't clearly state the mission of the organization on this particular page".
- "Everything. No pictures, no information, no donate link, ugly colors, small font".
- "It does not outline how money will be spent and how donations will help to achieve goals that are important to members".
- "It is hard to find what the issues are because they're at the bottom of the page. First and foremost, the organization should make an absolute point of showing the viewer what

the consequences of dirty water are. Then, the viewer will be more interested in the charity's goals".

- "Very short description of what they are doing im sure its located elsewhere on the website".
- "It is too brief and vague".
- "To me this is a big glaring error--they make no reference to anything specific that they do aside from collecting money. How are they using the money to ensure that we have clean water? There are no examples at all, and as far as I'm concerned, this is a mistake".
- "I think it would be good if they listed one or two SPECIFIC programs or evidence of impact on environmental legislation. I think these types of requests for support are more compelling when a "story" is told"
- "The goal they are trying to reach needs to be better explained".
- "I have no idea what they do exactly i can just assume its about water because of the name".
- "have no idea what they do and why they want the donations"
- "It is not specific about its projects. It is too broad in its message and scope".
- "The lack of information on how they are going to help clean our water".
- "It is too broad in scope. It needs to be more specific about its projects".
- "Was short would like to have known what they have accomplished in past".
- "It doesn't say anything. Because there are no facts, there's no credibility. This looks more like something that would be posted internally to members of the group to remind them why the group needs their support. I appreciate clean water and I might be moved to donate to this cause, but only if I personally knew people that were involved with it. I would need to have the huge credibility boost of people involved, because the credibility of the page itself is so low".
"Also, the stuff on the left is blocky and visually distracting. The weight of the colors draws your eye in and away from the text. That's not the worst thing ever, as the text doesn't really say anything. But neither do the blocks. Its lose-lose".
- "I don't think there is enough focus on exactly what Clean Water Action does. HOW do they work to influence policy? More specifically, what successes have they had in the past and what are some of their clear goals for the future? In other words, where exactly is a contributor's money going?"
- "There is no depth to how this group plans to use the donations they receive to eventually better the quality of life in and around the waterways".
- "they don't tell there exact points of helping"
- "It doesn't describe their efforts in detail and how exactly does their program work".
- "The piece as a whole seems a little unclear as to what exactly this organization is trying to achieve, and what the precise goals are. Some specific samples of it's work would be helpful. It's all kind of wishy washy".
- "Could use more pictures, and make more of a personal appeal".

About the Do Diligence Sounding Board

Just whose opinions are these, anyway? The "Do Diligence Sounding Board" is a standing body of U.S. residents who provide feedback on marketing materials and perform related tasks in return for payment.

A major corporation recruits the board members, maintains the system for securing their feedback, and handles the financial transactions. Water Words That Work, LLC pays to access to this service, as do other marketing firms.

The feedback that you receive from the sounding board is different from feedback you receive from your peers, for three reasons:

- The sounding board members who review your materials approach them like actual everyday citizen "in the wild." They are not professionals in the field and have not participated in the drafting of the materials.
- The sounding board members have never met you, and will provide their feedback anonymously. Their feedback will not be influenced by their personal relationship with you.
- The sounding board more closely approximates the demographic makeup (especially race and education) of the U.S. "public" than the staff and board of most nature protection and pollution control organizations.

Demographic Trait	Environmental Professionals	Do Diligence Sounding Board	Traditional Telephone Poll, U.S. Sample	Actual U.S. (Census)
4 Year College Degree	95% or higher	~50%	~40%	24%
White/Caucasian	95% or higher	~80%	~80%	79%

All sounding board answers are verbatim -- including spelling and typographic errors.

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P.O. Box 2182, Falls Church, VA 22042 703.635.4380 <http://waterwordsthatwork.com>