

Insights from Conservation Focus Groups



Focus Group Methodology

	Survey Details
Language	English (3 groups) and Spanish (2 groups)
Length	120 minutes
Participants	Residents living in Metropolitan Water District area of varying age, ethnicity, counties, and income groups
Focus Group Fielding	May 9 - 23, 2023
Focus Group Participants	62

Familiarity with Conservation Messaging

- Conservation messages appear to be penetrating and making a lasting impression among residents; they are committed to conservation
- Some feel that the frequency of messaging is overwhelming and places sole responsibility on individual consumers
- They feel a high level of personal responsibility and are willing to do their part
- Majority of respondents are maintaining conservation behaviors even without restrictions or drought

“Well, it might be a drop in the ocean, but I think it’s a drop. It’s something, and it makes me feel better about myself and about my role in all of this.”

Conservation Messaging Burnout

- There was a widespread sense of frustration from participants feeling like they are already doing everything they can to reduce water use
- They expressed a desire for greater accountability and transparency of non-residential users
- Many wanted to know what the state of California is doing to manage the water supply

“I feel like they’re asking for more than we have left to give and that they ought to be concentrating on improving the infrastructure so that more rain can be captured in reservoirs and so forth.”

Rebates

- Participants were presented with three available rebates:
 - High-Efficiency Clothes Washer
 - Weather-Based Irrigation Controllers
 - Turf Replacement Program
- Participants were favorable toward rebates but questioned if the cost savings were worth the investment in upgrades
- Specifically, with Turf Replacement, participants liked the appearance of California-native plants but are skeptical of the initial investment and cost of upkeep
- Low-income respondents were concerned about reimbursement and would prefer to receive money at the time of purchase

Messaging

- Participants responded most favorably to messaging that promoted water-saving tips and the cost savings associated with water conservation
- The term “water conservation” was preferred by 58% of participants as opposed to the term “water efficiency”
- Participants want to see messaging that is more positive and focuses on sustainability for future generations

“Just speak to my heartstrings, would be thinking of my children or my children’s children, their future. So something about a call to action today to help the future kids.”

Recommendation #1:

Part of the strategic messaging strategy should include education on the agency's and state's actions to manage the water supply.

“If you look at all the rain we’ve got this year and most of the water, although we’ve got a good snowpack and reservoirs were filled up a little bit, awful lot of this water went straight into the ocean or down the drain. We have to find a better way to save it if we’re going to continue living here.”

Recommendation #2:

Effective messaging strategies should recognize citizen efforts (consider messages of gratitude) and demonstrate their conservation's effect on the system.

“I’d like to know what percentage of the state is already conserving...we need some concrete numbers.”

“I think water usage stats should show by neighborhood or by city, how much is being conserved, as opposed to last year.”

“Anything that I can conserve will help my community and neighbors. So, it’s a domino effect.”

Recommendation #3:

Consider structuring rebate messaging to demonstrate the lifetime cost savings of upgrades and targeted messaging for individuals in the market for product or landscaping upgrades.

“How much does it cost you and how much does the rebate they give you compare? Also, if you’re not a homeowner, this won’t affect you or you won’t be interested in it.”

“This would motivate me to look into getting the systems, but it wouldn’t automatically motivate me to buy the system.”

“If you’re going to save just \$30, \$40 a month, but this changeover costs \$12,000, that to me is not much of a savings.”

Recommendation #4:

Consider messaging strategies that continue your focus on tips for water saving and the cost savings associated with rebates or conservation strategies.

Desired behaviors from message design should include an incentive for doing so (e.g., “visit [bewaterwise.com](https://www.bewaterwise.com) for tips on cutting your water bill in half!”)

Recommendation #5:

Maintain familiar language (water conservation) throughout the messaging strategies and focus messaging on both current and future impacts that evoke feelings of hope, sustainability for future generations, and nostalgia.

“Having grown up in LA, I remember hearing these messages since I was about eight years old...just to go full circle, my eight-year-old now is probably my biggest source of water conservation.”

“I’ve lived in California my whole life and I know it’s cyclical...we’re still maintaining the conservation efforts that we did historically or recently because I know it’s going to happen again.”

Questions?

Adam Probolsky, President

O: 949-855-6400 | M: 949-697-6726

E: adamp@probolskyresearch.com

Alyce Basil PhD, Senior Research Analyst

E: alyce@probolskyresearch.com

Market and Opinion Research

