

Changing the Climate on Climate Change

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Governments around the world have made significant progress in recent years in committing to reducing carbon emissions. While such advances are promising, however, that policymakers have largely ignored the central role of human behavior as a contributor to climate change, researchers say.

“Significant further actions are needed at the federal, state, and local government level, as well as in industry, civic organizations, and individual households,” according to researchers Sander van der Linden (Princeton University), Edward Maibach (George Mason University), and Anthony Leiserowitz (Yale University).

In a [article](#) published in *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, van der Linden, Maibach, and Leiserowitz draw on extensive research in psychological science to provide five “best practice” insights that provide actionable strategies for improving public policy and decision making on climate change:

1. **Make it personal:** Focusing on personal experiences by highlighting memories, stories, and metaphors underscores the relevance of climate change to people as individuals.
2. **Emphasize the social aspect:** Engaging social group norms to capitalize on humans’ strong social orientation can help to spur collective action.
3. **Bring it close to home:** Emphasizing the immediate impacts of climate change, and potential community-based solutions, helps people think of climate change as an urgent, local issue.
4. **Focus on the gains:** Framing policy solutions in terms of what can be gained shows that policies aimed at addressing climate change bring real benefits, not just costs.
5. **Aim for the heart:** Tapping into people’s deeply held motivations encourages them to view tackling climate change as an issue that aligns with their own values.

The researchers note that some agencies are already implementing strategies that take some of these practices to heart. For example, the National Park Service provides concrete examples of how climate change has affected natural resources in specific parks. And NASA and The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) are supporting efforts to enable TV meteorologists to educate

viewers about the ongoing impacts of climate change in their own local communities.

According to van der Linden, Maibach, and Leiserowitz, a lack of public engagement on climate change “has led to much deferred public decision making about enacting effective adaptation and mitigation policies.” Shifting public conceptions of climate change from an abstract risk to a personal and present danger will help to advance climate change policymaking, they conclude.

To learn more about these best practices and their policy implications, read the [full article](#).