

Demos Training On Taxes And Government

The ***Alliance to Protect the Public Good*** campaign to save services and build support for public structures and programs coordinated training for over 75 Wisconsin activists on a new approach to outreach that touches people's attachment to their community and their hope for the future. The training was conducted by Patrick Bresette of the DEMOS' Public Works Project who encouraged communication that does not stress negative, hopeless feelings but builds a sense of practical control over vital public systems.

DEMOS is a national non-profit organization committed to strengthening democracy in the United States. The Public Works Project has done extensive research on how most people perceive government and various strategies for overcoming common negative stereotypes. Patrick Bresette, a long time activist in Texas, is working with ten states to help organizations communicate more effectively about the public sector.

The training in Milwaukee addressed a diverse audience – elected officials, school superintendents, union leaders, PTA members, park advocates, non-profit directors, religious activists, retired persons and others.

Some key points of the training were:

- 1) Talking to people is not like writing on a blank slate – people's minds are already filled with ideas, perceptions and ways of seeing the world. Our job is to find a way to connect to those existing perceptions in a way that connects and strengthens a positive view of the public sector.
- 2) When we "frame" our communication to connect effectively, we need to start with a positive value that we share with the listener – big ideas like justice, fairness, family, opportunity, clean air, good education, etc.
- 3) It is important to focus on systems, not individuals – contrary to the media emphasis on personal stories. We want people to think in terms of social issues with political solutions.
- 4) We need clear ways of explaining policies – metaphors that are easy to understand. Like using the image of a "hole in the roof" for ozone depletion.
- 5) It is crucial not to repeat anti-tax/government statements and try to refute them – it just reminds the listener of the negative analysis.
- 6) We need to use numbers in a way that makes a point. If a person hears 600,000 people, it is not as vivid as saying as many people as live in the entire city of Milwaukee.
- 7) Outreach must include a solution – who is responsible for the problem and how we can resolve the issue.