



Inspiring  
visitors and  
advancing  
conservation

an ocean of opportunities

## executive summary

**Since the late 1990s**, The Ocean Project has helped dramatically increase understanding of national public opinion about the ocean. Beginning with qualitative and quantitative research that took an initial snapshot in the late 1990s, and expanding into a series of advanced surveys using leading-edge approaches to gather more than 100,000 opinions and regularly track changes since 2008, much has been learned about public perceptions of ocean-related environmental issues.



Together with the help of IMPACTS Research, and in collaboration with Monterey Bay Aquarium and National Aquarium, The Ocean Project's research has developed into the single largest and most comprehensive investigation ever undertaken on behalf of any environmental concern. This work was accomplished primarily to assist zoos, aquariums, and museums (ZAMs) engage their audiences more effectively for conservation outcomes and impact. The research, therefore, has also focused on the critical roles that these institutions can play in advancing ocean and climate conservation.



Based on our recent 2014 research study and reinforced by years of previous survey work, the implications for conservation impact are clear:

1. Peoples' underlying concern for the ocean is heightened by visits to ZAMs, as well as newsworthy events.
2. When visiting a ZAM, people expect, trust, and appreciate information about conservation.
3. People are much more likely to be interested in information about the ways they can be part of the solution, and much less interested in being educated about the problem.
4. People are inspired by emotional stories about the impacts on specific animals and particular places, rather than facts and figures.

5. Interest inspired by a visit can wane quickly, so consider action steps that can be started, if not completed, while visiting.
6. Integrate the Internet and social media into visitor experiences to reinforce your conservation messaging and action steps.
7. Focusing on engaging those ages 13-25 will achieve the most impact since youth tend to be the most interested and the most willing to act, with a high potential to influence others.
8. "Walking the talk" as an institution resonates with audiences, especially when visitors and members are positioned as part of the effort in a "together we can" approach that also helps get to the scale necessary to effect change.

Despite an enormous collective effort in communicating with the public, we have not yet succeeded in convincing enough people that ocean issues are urgent and deserve attention. We need to do more, and the research shows that ZAMs can be bold. The research not only tells ZAMs that the time is right to recalibrate our efforts to engage and inspire the public in conservation, but it also reassures us that our doing so is likely to be rewarded with higher levels of trust and attendance.

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