

Engaging End Users:

Marketing, Messaging &
Trail Activation



Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge

Trails are essential to people, places and the planet



90%

of people say that it is important that everyone have access to trails.

88%

of people say that tax dollars should be spent on maintaining and improving trails.

61%

of people say they would like to spend more time on the trail.

Source: Stratalys Research, Rails to Trails Conservancy National Opinion Poll, Released December 2023

Engagement marketing prioritizes the beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the community we seek to engage.



Pittsburgh Celebrate Trails Day / Robin Woods

Defining Engagement

Engagement is not just about how often people use a trail, but **how deeply they identify with it.**

It reflects their willingness to return, contribute and ultimately champion the trail as part of their community's fabric.

True engagement turns awareness into ownership.



Baltimore / Side A Photography

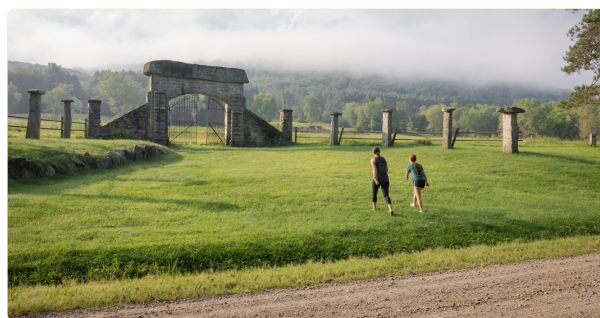
Shared Values



Camden Greenway/ Jack Larson

What interests/motivates your communities?

Different Experiences



Oil Creek State Park Trail / Renee Rosensteel

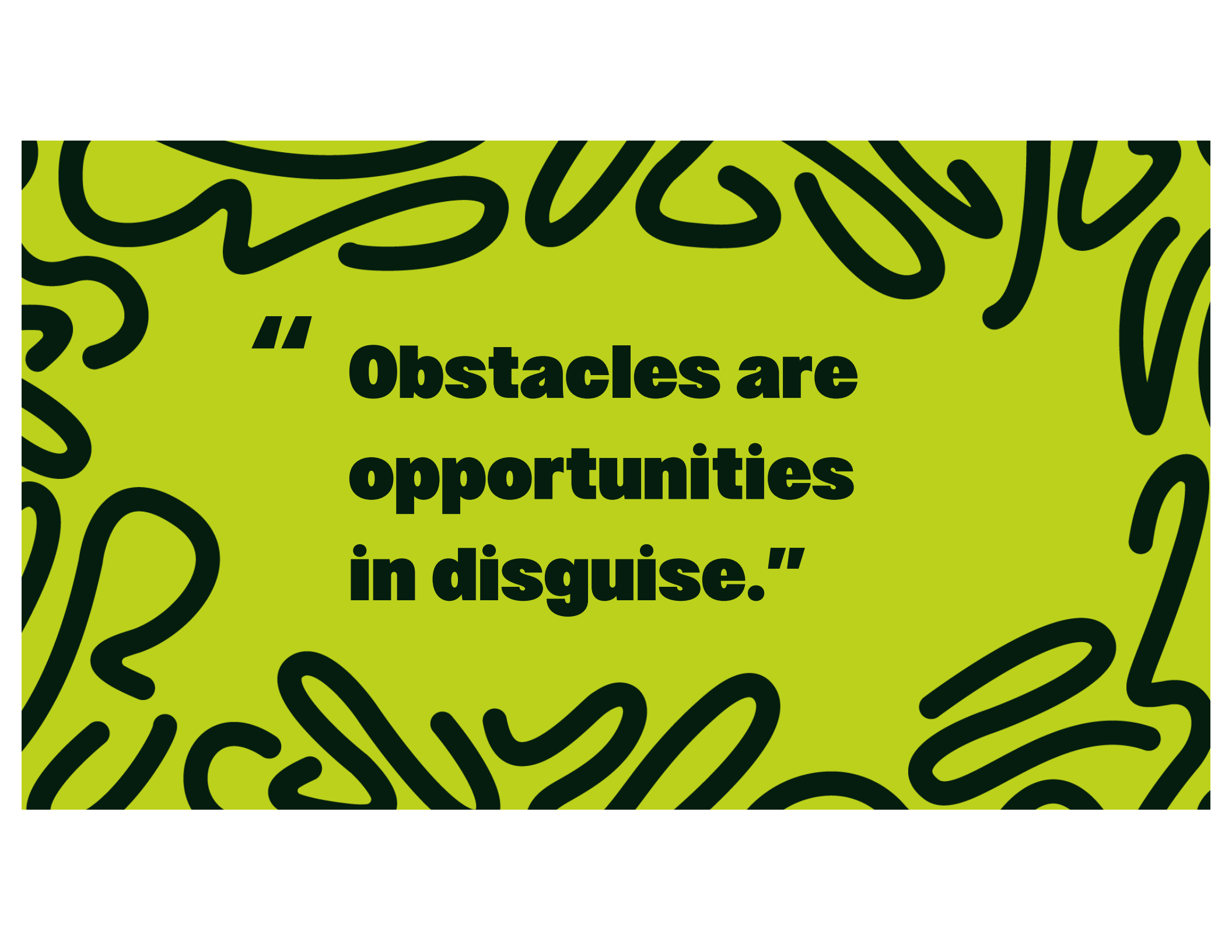
How do different perceptions impact participation?

Is it a destination or a thoroughfare?

Do I feel welcome and safe?

Do I look like I belong here?

Can I get there and get where I'm going?

The background of the image is a solid yellow color. Overlaid on this background are numerous thick, dark green, wavy lines that resemble stylized, flowing patterns or perhaps abstract representations of hair or liquid. These lines are scattered across the entire frame, creating a dynamic and textured visual effect.

**// Obstacles are
opportunities
in disguise."**

Barriers to use

Access + Information

People don't know the trail exists, where it goes or how to access it.

Confusion about rules

Accessibility issues (narrow paths, uneven surfaces, lack of ADA accommodations).

Safety

Fear of crime, harassment or being alone on a trail.

Poor lighting, maintenance issues or lack of visibility.

Belonging

Perception that trails aren't for them.

Anxiety about not knowing trail etiquette or feeling unprepared.

Worry about physical fitness level ("Will I be able to keep up?").



Engagement marketing demystifies the experience—making clear that this is for me, about me and safe for me.

Making it theirs

Advanced messaging: "It's MY Place."

Reflects ownership, pride and advocacy.

Moves people from observers → participants
→ champions.

Result: Engagement evolves naturally.

People begin claiming cultural places as part
of their personal story.

Support grows from occasional visits to
belonging and advocacy.

Continuum of Trail Support

AMENITY

NECESSITY

Trails are nice

**We use
trails for fun**

**We need
trails**

**We demand
trail networks**

"I don't necessarily get all the hype, but good for you all."

"I think trail networks are important for communities."

"I think trail networks are **necessary** for the well-being of communities."

"I **demand** trail networks for my community. **What can I do?**"

SKEPTIC

CHAMPION



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**Conversation is a
catalyst for innovation."**

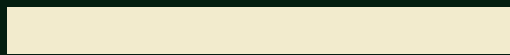
-JSB, Amazon board member



Razorback Regional Greenway | Northwest Arkansas Razorback Greenway Alliance

**Hold for Case
Study Slides**

Identity Before Geography



"Your Thing"

Sparks attention



"Your Place"

Builds relevance.



"Your Tribe"

Creates connection

Defining Your Audiences

To deepen your engagement, you need to be sure you've identified *who* you're engaging – understanding who's on your trail, who's missing and who's essential for moving projects along.

No one audience is going to be the right one to engage all the time.



W & OD | Albert Ting Photography

Your Audience

Your audience will shift depending on your goals. If your goal is to build out trail use programming, your audience is different than if you want maintenance funding approved in the budget.



Personas

Audience personas are efficient, focused frameworks for getting brand connection right. They distill real user data into actionable profiles that help predict behavior and sharpen messaging. Instead of marketing to “everyone” and hoping something sticks, personas help make informed choices that align with how people *actually* think, move and decide. They’re not about creativity—they’re about clarity.

Built from real data and behavior patterns, they refine what different types of users need, expect and respond to for maximum impact.

Action Planning

Message Framework

OPPORTUNITY

Challenge the idea that trails aren't essential to your community. That they're only for athletes or weekend recreation.

INSIGHT

Trails connect to **daily priorities**—safety, family time, wellness, saving money, building community.

Trails affect everyone, whether you're walking to school, commuting to work, enjoying nature or seeking safer streets.

STRATEGY

Normalize trail use as a *default* choice for moving, connecting and thriving by highlighting stories of impact and use.

MESSAGE

Answer the question "Why should they care?"

Answer the question "What can they do about it?"

Recaps

Strategies for Adoption

Place people and their experience **at the center of the story**—align with their priorities and meet them where they are.

Showcase diverse audiences, having diverse experiences, in diverse neighborhoods—video, editorial/web/social, press.

Engage less traditional tactics—street teams for connection, temporary signage to increase awareness, influencers.

Balance paid media targeting in new and proven channels.

Position destination, and the experience as **personally relevant**.

Reach Out!

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