



ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION CIVICS

Earth Force

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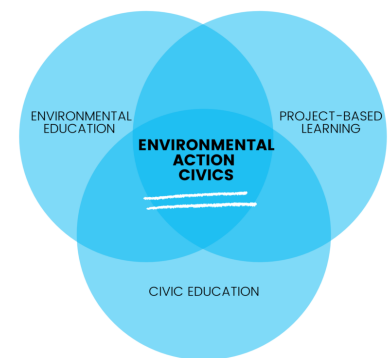
Environmental Action Civics positions youth to work in partnership with adults to identify a local environmental issue and engage with community members to take action by advocating for systemic changes to policies and practices.

OVERVIEW

Environmental Action Civics was developed by Earth Force to engage young people as active citizens who address environmental issues in their communities, both now and in the future. It is a research-based approach that focuses on project-based learning and civic action to empower students to identify environmental problems, investigate their root causes, and design and implement solutions through civics. Through this process, students develop important civic skills that will help them make a real impact in their communities, particularly those that have been historically marginalized.



Environmental Action Civics embodies the belief that participation in local environmental decision-making is critical to equitable processes, innovative solutions, and enduring democratic and civic skills. It gives more people a voice in local environmental decision-making, particularly youth who are likely to bring fresh perspectives to problems. It also helps young people build a civic toolkit to solve problems as they develop a sense of social responsibility that fosters environmental stewardship and community engagement.



Each year, Earth Force works with approximately 67 schools and organizations in 28 states to engage students in Environmental Action Civics. Earth Force offers resources, professional development, consulting, and a community of practice for schools and organizations interested in implementing the model. [▶What is Environmental Action Civics?](#) [▶Young People Reflect on Community Resilience to Natural Hazards](#) [📄Environmental Action Civics Overview](#)

What Makes This Model Innovative?



Relevance

Students learn about the environment within the context of their own lived experiences. Place and identity are central to the civic engagement that students experience as advocates for the environment.



Social Consciousness & Action

Students study the environment as a part of larger social systems and environmental problems as a part of inequity and injustice. In the process, they learn how to engage in change-making actions.



Connection & Community

Throughout their projects, students partner with peers, teachers, and local stakeholders to deepen their understanding of the community and the environment. They contextualize solutions to environmental problems in collective effort.

DESIGN

Goals

The goals of Environmental Action Civics embody the belief that participation in local environmental decision-making is critical to equitable processes, innovative solutions, and enduring democratic and civic skills.

Citizenship

Students build democratic skills like discussion, deliberation, and debate to engage policymakers and advocate for environmental issues in their local community.

Research

Students conduct qualitative and quantitative research to collect information in their community that helps them identify the root causes of environmental problems.

Problem-Solving

Students develop equity-focused action plans to address environmental issues using a civic toolkit, research, and fresh perspectives.

Environmentalism

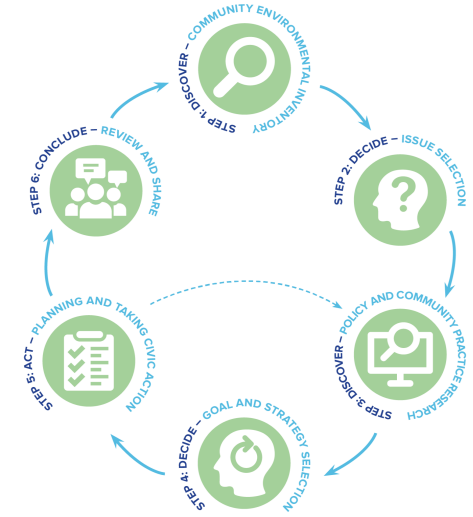
Students learn to be active stewards of the natural world by advocating for policies that enhance ecosystem resilience and well-being.

Experience

Earth Force uses a research-based process to guide students through Environmental Action Civics. The process engages students in Civic Action Projects to meet an environmental need in their local community. Projects are typically completed in small groups where democratic processes such as discussion, deliberation, debate, and voting are used to make decisions. Peer accountability measures ensure that individual students are responsible for tasks throughout projects.

During projects, students focus on advocacy for systemic changes to environmental policies and practices as they work through a series of six steps to design and complete projects that will teach them widely transferable skills.

[📄 Environmental Action Civics Roadmap](#)



Community Environmental Inventory

Students begin their projects by conducting an environmental inventory to identify environmental strengths and concerns. The inventory can take several forms: a survey, a walking tour of the school grounds, an energy use audit, demographic data to identify inequities, or other tools. They develop an awareness of the roles played by an environmental citizen and of the importance of taking public action in their community. This step of the process allows students to learn about the environment in the context of their own identities and lived experiences. [▶Step 1: Community Environmental Inventories](#) [📄Inventory: Keys to Success](#)

Issue Selection

During this step of the process, as a group, students select a single issue as the focus of their project. Students use criteria-based, democratic decision-making to work with peers, teachers, and community members as they refine the topic that they will research and study. Environmental Action Civics projects have unique relevance as they allow students to select an issue they are excited about while also supporting teacher academic goals. [▶Step 2: Issue Selection](#) [📄What's For Lunch - An Example of Criteria-Based Decision-Making](#)




Policy & Community Practice Research



As students conduct research for their projects, they develop a more holistic understanding by exploring policies and practices related to their issue. They seek to identify the root causes of their issue by:

- using questioning and information analysis skills,


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- identifying and interacting with stakeholders and experts,
 - exploring different perspectives, and
 - discovering strategies for change.

Students also engage three or more community members (including those impacted by the issue) to better understand their issue and inform an equitable and impactful action plan. [▶Step 3: Policy and Community Practice Research](#)  [Examples of Policies & Practices](#)

Goal & Strategy Selection


Students use democratic and criteria-based decision-making to select one policy or practice they want to change. They also select the most appropriate strategy to achieve the desired change based on what they have learned from local stakeholders in their community. The student-led discussions in this stage of a project are evidence-based and contextualize how students understand the issue they are working on. These take place in the classroom or learning space with the educator supporting the process. [▶Step 4: Goal and Strategy Selection](#)  [Strategy Selection Grid](#)  [Examples and Inspiration of Strategies for Your Change](#)

Planning & Taking Action

Students collaboratively create an action plan for the change they seek to make in their community. Because they are focused on long-term solutions that address the root causes of the problem they want to solve, they engage people in positions of power and partner with adults and allies to advocate for solutions. [▶Step 5: Taking Action!](#)  [Action Planning Sheet](#)



Review & Share

Students use prompts to review their learning experience by recognizing their successes, analyzing challenges, reflecting on lessons learned, and identifying potential next steps for their projects. These written reflections inform the students' public presentations, through which they share their work with peers, stakeholders, and supporters. Finally, they submit their project story to Earth Force where it is celebrated and shared more widely. [▶Step 6: Celebration and Reflection](#)  [Reflection Prompts and Methods](#)



Supporting Structures

The following shifts in school structures support the implementation of the Environmental Action Civics model. Because the model is highly adaptable, there is flexibility in how it can be adopted.

Environmental Action Civics is built upon six steps that are sequenced to help students grow as environmental citizens.

Environmental Action Civics emphasizes process rather than product to foster skills and empowerment for students. The model can be adapted into any curriculum but must include three key experiences to be adopted with fidelity: (1) working in a youth-adult partnership to select the environmental issue the young people want to work on; (2) deliberating relevant policies and community practices; and (3) asking for a change from someone in power. The scaffolding within the steps ensures that Civic Action Projects can be aligned with curricular goals in different classes and within different time frames.



CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

Environmental Action Civics is accessible by any age group, although Earth Force materials are generally geared toward middle and high school students. It is particularly suited to schools that practice project-based and inquiry-based learning. The model is most commonly incorporated into social studies and science courses, although it has also been adopted in after-school programming.

The process at the center of Environmental Action Civics inspires participation in real-world, local problem-solving working side-by-side with adults. The quality of Environmental Action Civics is measured by the Roadmap rather than any specific assessment. [Environmental Action Civics Roadmap](#) The process also aligns with Next Generation Science Standards and College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards. [Earth Force Align & Plan](#)



SCHOOL COMMUNITY & CULTURE

The Environmental Action Civics model relies on a community and culture that supports student voice and civic engagement.

A central element of Environmental Action Civics is a commitment to prepare young people, especially those from historically marginalized communities, to engage in local decision-making processes that impact the environment. Schools adopting the model must be open to encouraging student voice and be prepared to support students who are working for change in their community.



To cultivate the agency that students need in their action civics projects, adults must share power and let students assume full responsibility for their work.

ADULT ROLES, HIRING, & LEARNING

Because Environmental Action Civics seeks to encourage active citizenship in students, teachers must be willing to step aside and let students work through established processes to develop and complete their projects. This means that adults guide students toward learning rather than direct them to answers. Adults serve as learning partners who let students work through processes to practice professional and personal skills that will carry long-term value in life.



SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

Environmental Action Civics is designed to be incorporated into any schedule.

The Environmental Action Civics model can be adapted to different lengths of time depending on school or teacher needs. It could be used as the framework for a semester-long course or as a multi-week project in a specific class or program. Although the time commitment can vary, a minimum of 10 hours is likely needed to complete the six steps of a Civic Action Project at the most basic level.



FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships in the local community enhance the opportunities for impact that students have in Civic Action Projects.

As a part of their civic action projects, students must reach out to members of their local community. Partnerships can help students develop more powerful projects by giving them access to more diverse stakeholders as well as people in positions of power in their community. Although the level of engagement of community members will vary, partnerships are an important part of the learning process because they represent a portion of the public attitude toward the environment.

Schools adopting Environment Action Civics will need to commit time and energy to the cultivation of partnerships. In general, community partners are very willing to work with youth and schools, and being able to make virtual connections has made partnership development even easier.

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

[Earth Force](#) offers the following supports to help implement Environmental Action Civics.

Earth Force Resources

Free



Schools that want to implement Environmental Action Civics can access extensive resources. Resources are organized around each of the six steps that structure the model.

Register for a free account to access Earth Force resources.

[Access Now](#)

Professional Development

Free, Cost Associated



Earth Force provides different types of professional development and support for schools and districts:

- Educator Workshops
- Organization Workshops
- Ongoing Supports
- Community Forums
- Community of Practice (Coming Soon)

Custom workshops are also available for a fee.

[Learn More](#)

Reach

67

Organizations

28

States

680

Educators

40,954

Students

Impact

Evaluations by Brandeis University's Center for Youth & Communities over the past 18 years have found that Environmental Action Civics strengthens student civic commitment and participation and increases their sense of efficacy: [Environmental Action Civics History & Impact](#)

- 91% of students met with school or community leaders to ask them to take action.
- 84% of students show an increase in understanding of environmental issues.
- 77% of students are more likely to contact a public official to advocate for action on an environmental issue in the future.

Educators also reported that the Environmental Action Civics program positively impacted their teaching by increasing their knowledge of environmental issues and expanding their use of community issues and student-led projects in their classrooms:

- 70% of educators noted an increased sense of self-confidence as an educator.
- 91% of educators stated that Environmental Action Civics increased their students' belief that they can make a difference in the community.

Contact

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RESOURCES



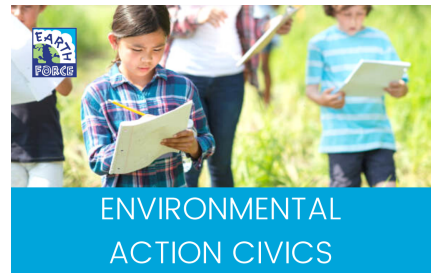
[What is Environmental Action Civics?](#)

A video explaining the Environmental Action Civics program.



[Young People Reflect on Community Resilience to Natural Hazards](#)

A video in which students share what they learned through Environmental Action Civics.



[Environmental Action Civics Overview](#)

A document describing the Environmental Action Civics program.

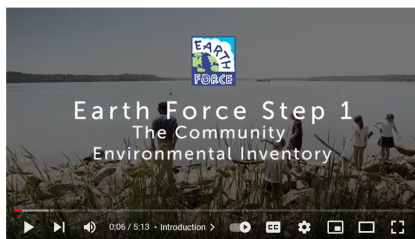
Environmental Action Civics Roadmap

Environmental Action Civics cultivates environmental citizens: active members of a community who have the environmental motivation and skills to engage in community decision-making.

KEY ELEMENTS	Beginning	Getting There...	Environmental Citizens
The Issue (Problem to address)	There wasn't a clear community issue addressed.	Youth participated in an already chosen issue or one that does not reflect community needs.	The issue reflects youth's lived experience, interest, and needs of the community.
Experiences			
Youth-Adult Partnership	Youth had little say in deciding the issue, solution, or action. Adults offered path options and valued youth opinion at some points throughout the process.	Youth had some say in the issue and strategy, and participated in carrying out the action plan. Youth were given responsibilities but adults had most of the power.	Youth and adults worked together, in partnership, to choose the issue and strategy and carry out the action plan. Adults and youth accept responsibilities and power throughout the process.
Project & Task Management	Tasks were delegated by adults to youth.	Adults gave youth some responsibility for creating and completing tasks throughout.	Youth led and were responsible for tasks throughout, using peer accountability measures.
Democratic Leadership	A few voices decided on the issue and leadership without.	Some project decisions were made as a group with the majority.	All project decisions were made as a group with all voices at the table.

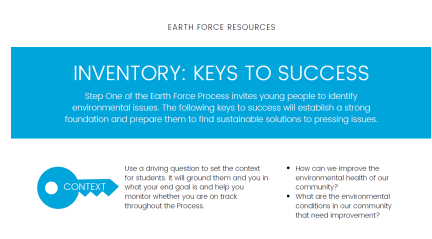
[Environmental Action Civics Roadmap](#)

A document outlining the



[Step 1: Community Environmental Inventories](#)

A video explaining how students survey



[Inventory: Keys to Success](#)

A document to help students complete an environmental inventory.

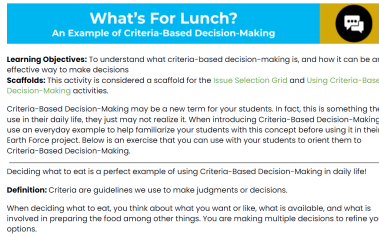
goals of Environmental Action Civics.



[Step 2: Issue Selection](#)

A video explaining how students choose issues for Civic Action Projects.

environmental issues in their community.



[What's For Lunch- An Example of Criteria-Based Decision-Making](#)

A document to help students make decisions using specific criteria.



[Step 3: Policy and Communication Practice Research](#)

A video explaining how students engage in research during Civic Action Projects.

[Examples of Policies & Practices](#)

Learning Objective: To review policies and practices and tie the concept to students' own lives.
Additional Information: The first two pages of this document is the educator version, the student version follows.
Scaffolds: This activity is considered a scaffold to others on the subject, and may not be necessary for your students.

1) You have learned a little about how policies (public and private) and practices are different. Look at this example as a reminder of how you can tell policies and practices apart.

Public Policies	Private Policies	Community Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You must be 18 to vote. Your town has a bike path that does not allow motor vehicles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ABC Petrochemical Company does not send untreated water to a nearby creek. Certain corporations donate money to the World Wildlife Fund. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My neighbors recycle their bottles and cans. I choose to pick up litter when I see it on the ground.

[Examples of Policies & Practices](#)

A document that illustrates the types of policies and practices students might engage in through Civic Action Projects.



[Step 4: Goal and Strategy Selection](#)

A video explaining how students develop a plan for action in Civic Action Projects.

[Strategy Selection Grid](#)

Learning Objective: To choose a single project strategy as a group to move forward with in the Earth Force experience, while maintaining buy-in from students.
Additional Information: Need help developing criteria? Look to the Using Criteria-Based Decision-Making activity found under Step 2 Resources, as well as the Differences between Step 2 and Step 4 Criteria under Step 4 Resources.
Scaffolds: Instead of using a 1-5 rating system per the instructions below, you have the option to place one "X" per criteria under the issue you think meets it best. To tally, count the number of "X" each issue has. Also, additional materials are in green text to help with certain aspects of this activity.

Use a 1-5 scale (or however many total strategy plans you are considering. 1 meaning it does not meet the criteria and 5 meaning it completely meets the criteria. Tally the scores at the bottom.

2) Once everyone has voted and scores are tallied, look to see if one is the clear winner, or if multiple are close. If one is clearly the winner, great! You are ready to move forward into Step 5: Taking Action! However, if there are a few that are relatively close, consider having a second round of voting with just those strategies. Precede it with a discussion on the merits of each, or a debate structure of the pros and cons of each. Consider hybridizing a few strategies, maybe incorporating aspects of each would be the best.

[Strategy Selection Grid](#)

A document to help students develop a strategy for Civic Action Projects.

[Examples and Inspiration of Strategies for Your Change](#)

Below is a list of potential strategies applicable to a wide variety of action projects. Use these to inspire the development of your own project idea. It is often a good idea to create a multi-faceted project. Students can get involved in pieces they are interested in, and you create higher chances for success.

In order to create a sustainable solution, keep your chosen policy/practice you would like to change in mind, as well as your community's needs.

Remember, an effective Earth Force project involves asking for change. So make sure your strategy includes at least one component from that category!

Ask for Change From a Person in Power:	Environmental Management:
<p>Note: "Power" can mean virtually if meetings are held in that manner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask policy makers to amend or create policy you would like to see Speak at city council meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement and maintain a buffer zone Label storm drains Create a rain garden and build a plain for its maintenance Replace impervious surfaces Improve wildlife habitat

[Examples and Inspiration of Strategies for Your Change](#)

A document listing potential strategies students can use in Civic Action Projects.



[Step 5: Taking Action!](#)

A video explaining how students take action in Civic Action Projects.

[Action Planning Sheet](#)

Learning Objectives: To connect the issue, policy/practice, and goal/strategy concepts together and move to concrete planning
Added Information: This sheet provides an example, the template to use with your class is provided on the next page.

Scaffolds: This document is embedded in the Writing An Action Plan: A Lesson lesson plan for added facilitation on step 5 from start to finish.

EXAMPLE	Key Parts of the Strategy (List the Main Categories of Tasks)
<p>Environmental Issue</p> <p>Our school throws away recyclable materials.</p>	<p>1) Researching cost savings and amount of recyclable waste produced by the district.</p> <p>2) Securing a spot on an upcoming school board agenda.</p>
<p>Policy or Practice to be Changed</p> <p>Our school district does not have a waste reduction and recycling policy in place</p>	

[Action Planning Sheet](#)

A document to help students plan how they will take action in Civic Action Projects.



[Step 6: Celebration and Reflection](#)

A video explaining how students process their learning at the end of Environmental Action Civics.

Reflection Prompts & Methods

Learning Objectives: To have students reflect on their experience to solidify the stewardship behaviors they embodied during the project experience.

Added Information: This activity is built to be very flexible. Students could choose which questions and methods they would like to answer, or you can assign questions and methods. It is completely up to you.

Earth Force recommends students answer at least one question that reflects upon their past experience, and one looking forward to the future. If you would like students to guide themselves in reflection, look to [The Card 3: Reflect On Your Work](#).

Scaffolds: Choose one method and the set of questions ahead of time to be used for the entire class. This will help with time and classroom management. Alternatively, use the [Step 6 Assessment activity](#) which is a ready-to-go reflection writing prompt.

Questions

- What have been your successes?
- What have been your challenges and how did you overcome them?
- How sustainable do you think our project will be?
- What impact did we have on the community? On the environment?
- Did your action project benefit a particular community more than others?

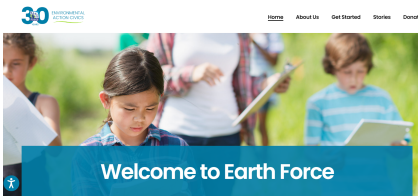
[Reflection Prompts and Methods](#)

A document to help students reflect on their learning at the end of Environmental Action Civics.



[Earth Force Align & Plan](#)

A video explaining the steps involved in an Environmental Action Civics program.



[Earth Force Website](#)

The website for Earth Force, which developed Environmental Action Civics.



[Environmental Action Civics History & Impact](#)

A website about the history and impact of Environmental Action Civics.