How to Start an Environmental Group
In Your School or Community

If you’re starting from scratch, use these steps as a guide to create an environmental group in your school or community. If you’re already part of a high school environmental or science club, consider this a checklist of suggestions for maximizing your club’s effectiveness.

Step 1: Do your homework.

There are a few questions to answer before you get started:

1.) Is there a base of 5-6 interested students who want to start an environmental group?
2.) Is there at least one adult volunteer (teacher, community leader, etc.) willing to support your efforts?
3.) Are there other organizations/entities/individuals present in the community that might be willing to help with your group’s activities? (technical assistance, transportation assistance, mentoring)
4.) Are there any existing youth environmental groups that you could join forces with? Linking with an existing group could strengthen your efforts and prevent you from “reinventing the wheel.”

Step 2: Confirm your Adult Sponsorship.

Most clubs are student-led and student-driven, but require adult sponsorship, as well. Sponsors ensure your club’s sustainability – students graduate or move, but dedicated sponsors are always available to keep the club running. Your adult sponsor(s) can also provide advice on administration and community relations. For school-based clubs, the sponsor or advisor is usually a teacher or someone else employed by the school. For community-based clubs, you may choose an active adult volunteer outside of the local school.

Step 3: Hold an Interest Session.

Once you have a core group of interested students, an adult sponsor/advisor and some potential community support, hold an informal interest session to determine what role your club will play in your school or community. The purpose of this session is to bring all interested people together to lay out the vision for your group, and brainstorm some possible activities/projects that you could do.

• Start by asking two questions: 1.) Why are we here? 2.) What do we want to accomplish?
  Setting specific goals is important for recruitment and fundraising purposes. If your goals are clear, then you will have an easier time convincing others to join you.

• Briefly inventory your school or community’s most pressing environmental needs to figure out how to fulfill a need while creating a niche for your club. (Step 7 describes a more comprehensive community inventory.) In addition, ask individuals to write their
personal environmental interests on a piece of paper. Bring this list to the next meeting, and spend some time brainstorming possible projects to address the topics people have listed.

- Talk with other students about your ideas and goals. If you find support for the club, set up an official Club Launch meeting.
- Get excited and stay excited! Don’t be discouraged if there are only a few members at the beginning. Remember that every organization starts small and builds, and even a few students and a sponsor can make a big difference.
- Make note of everyone who shows interest. A quick follow up letter or e-mail will show them that you are committed.

**Step 4: Hold Your First Meeting.**

Advertise! To get as many people as possible to hear about your club, post flyers, send emails, use PA announcements, or submit blurbs to your school or community newspaper/letter or radio station. Word of mouth is, however, the most effective method of publicity, so talk it up! Make sure you list a contact person for people to call if they want more information.

At your opening meeting:

- **Introductions:** Ask all members to introduce themselves. To encourage interaction, try a fun ice-breaker!
- **Snacks:** Everyone loves food, and events with food are more likely to draw people. If you provide food, *make sure you mention this on your flier.*
- **Expectations:** Let each person share why they are at this opening meeting. Individuals need to have a voice, and this first meeting is crucial to understanding what they want to get out of this experience. Some people will have no idea what they want yet, and are just curious. That’s great!
- **History:** If you are beginning a new year with a pre-existing group, provide new members some history on your environmental club.
- **By-Laws and Leadership:** Set up club by-laws to clarify the goals and the regulations of your club, and introduce possible leadership positions. Whatever positions you choose, make sure they are agreed upon by the group and that the roles and expectations are clear. You may also want to discuss the group’s decision-making process. (You may not determine this at the very first meeting—but ideas should be raised and then a structure should be decided at the next meeting.) Plan to hold elections within the first month of school.
- **Future Meetings:** Choose a consistent meeting date and time. Try to accommodate as many people as possible, but remember that no date and time will work for everyone.
- **Contacts:** Develop a contact list. Everyone at the meeting should sign in with his or her name, grade/age, address, phone number, and e-mail address.
- **Action:** Take action, even at the first meeting. For example, encourage every attendee to tell at least one potential member about the club.

Don’t forget to continue to advertise and recruit members!
Step 5: Join forces with a network of environmental organizations

Find resources and gain support by joining a nationwide network of high school environmental classes, clubs and leaders. There are a number of environmental networks to check out on the web, including (list a few). Go to (a page on our web site)

Step 6: Identify Your Focus Project(s).

Based on your lists of community needs and member interests, brainstorm ideas for a year long community action project. The project should be group oriented, have a measurable outcome, and address a topic that both benefits your school or community and interests group members. You will likely come up with many different project ideas. Realize that your group will not use all these ideas (yet) – that’s okay!

Step 7: Conduct a Community Inventory.

In order to choose a project and develop a project plan that best serves your school or community, inventory your surroundings. Which projects are most needed? Which ideas will have the greatest impact? What local organizations can provide resources and expertise in the various project areas? Include club members, sponsors, parents, and school or community leaders in the inventory, and research all sides of the issues you identify as most pressing.

Also, learn from the successes and failures of other school and community groups. Find school or community organizations who share your mission, and start to develop partnerships. Pooling people and resources increases everyone’s productivity.

Finally, think of everyone as a potential resource. Check out local non-profit agencies, home and garden stores, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Parks and Recreation, your regional chapter of the Environmental Protection Agency, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H...in other words, try everyone!

Step 8: Develop an Action Project Plan.

After brainstorming action project ideas, focus on ONE topic/subject area for your initial effort. Two reminders: 1.) keep your project local, and 2.) get everyone involved. Following these two reminders will lead to action projects that empower your club members and really make a difference in your community. Develop a timeline that clearly lists goals, dates, and responsibilities.

Step 9: Diversify Your Activities.

Your community action project will be a yearlong endeavor, but why not plan special events for extra visibility? Get students outside for a clean-up or planting day, sponsor a field trip to a local wetland, zoo, or nature reserve, or hold an Environmental Awareness day at school. Brainstorm other creative ways to introduce your club to the school and community.

Step 10: Implement Your Plans!

Additional Tips and Tools:
• When creating a school-based club, check with your school to make sure you know the procedure for setting up an after school club or group. There is usually some paperwork to fill out ahead of time in order to be approved.

• **Finding an Advisor:** Look at the "Roles and Responsibilities" section when choosing an Advisor; make sure the person who works with you and other students has the same expectations as you and fellow students about his/her role in the group. If you are having trouble locating an Advisor, contact your local National Wildlife Federation office for assistance.

• **Finding a meeting spot:** For a community-based group, choose a meeting spot that most people can get to easily. (Choose a location where you won’t be charged to have meetings!)

**The Power of One: Working on Your Own with Group Support**

Perhaps you are the only high school student in your village or community. Maybe you are a home-schooled student and are working independently. Or maybe you just want to work on your own! Whatever the reason, National Wildlife Federation can help with:

• **Project planning:** If you are interested in starting a project, ask us for resources in the area of your interest.

• **Guidance:** National Wildlife Federation staff can help when you need assistance. It is still a good idea to find some kind of advisor who will help you on a local level with transportation, logistics, or other support.
**Defining Your Group’s Leadership Roles**

In group settings, good leadership is fundamental! Thoughtful leaders motivate, inspire, and model good behavior for other group members. Before having the first all-group meeting, a group of core students (here called the Steering Committee) and the adult sponsor/advisor should meet to discuss leadership roles and responsibilities, and how these leadership roles will be filled in the future.

**Student Leadership Roles**

The following table lists six student leadership roles appropriate for any group. Use this as a guide as you create your own list of roles and responsibilities based on your group’s needs!

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<th>RESPONSIBILITIES</th>
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| President/Chairperson                | • Oversees all of the duties and activities of the group  
• Drafts meeting agendas  
• Runs meetings (or chooses someone else to facilitate) |
| Vice President/Vice Chair            | • Assumes President’s responsibilities in President’s absence                                                                                 |
| Project Coordinator/Events Coordinator | • Oversees the operations of any current club projects  
• Organizes the planning of future endeavors  
• Organizes fundraisers  
• Coordinates with the President/Chair to set event dates  
• Delegates specific event tasks to other group members |
| Secretary                            | • Handles all group correspondence  
• Takes notes on the business of the group  
• Takes minutes of all meetings (or designates someone else to take notes in his/her absence)  
• Keeps meeting attendance records |
| Treasurer                            | • Tracks the financial status of the club  
• Deposits all monies into the proper account |
| Public Relations Coordinator         | • Notifies available media sources (paper, radio, etc.) of any upcoming events or announcements  
• Sends photos/stories to the local paper or school newsletter to promote past events.  
• Creates flyers about events/activities, and is responsible for getting them posted |

**Adult Sponsor/Advisor Role**

Your sponsor/advisor is an invaluable resource! For school-based clubs, the sponsor or advisor is usually a teacher or someone else employed by the school. For community-based clubs, you may choose an active adult volunteer outside of the local school. Sponsors ensure your club’s sustainability – students graduate or move, but dedicated sponsors are always available to keep the club running.
Roles and Responsibilities:

- Be supportive of group efforts
- Mediate areas of tension
- Offer suggestions when a group runs into a dead end
- Help with logistics (building reservations, administrative relations, etc.)
- Chaperone (when necessary)
- Brainstorm project ideas and ways to be involved in the community
- Offer resources and help gather information when necessary

Questions to consider:

- How many meetings should the advisor attend?
- How active should the advisor be at the meetings?
- How should disputes within the group be dealt with?
- Does the advisor have a mediating role?
- What is the advisor’s role in upcoming projects and trainings (if relevant)?

Remember: Advisors may assist with initiating projects or making group decisions, but students hold the main leadership roles!

Recruitment and Outreach

Every group needs members to be successful. From the very beginning, your group should be reaching out and trying to involve others in your efforts. Get the word out about your club’s goals and activities! Here are some traditionally effective publicity tools:

Fliers

Tips for designing flyers:

1.) For starters, there’s the **KISS** rule: Keep It Short and Simple. Design an eye-catching flyer that conveys the following:
- We are an environmental group.
- Here are our relevant and exciting goals!
- We are an action-oriented group.
- We want YOU to be involved.

2.) Make sure your flyer includes the following information:
- Meeting time and place (especially important for a first meeting)
- A catchy message (e.g. “Students Working for a Better Earth Tomorrow”)
- The group’s name and brief mission

3.) Remember: When a reader’s eyes scan a flyer, they first read the middle, then the top, then the bottom.

4.) Don’t let your flyer become too busy or crowded with information.

When you have designed an effective flyer, check with school and community guidelines to see where you can legally hang them. Be creative: community event boards, cafes, and local hangouts are great places to advertise.
Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

Plan ahead! If possible, get a short announcement about your club meeting included in the school’s morning or weekly announcements. If your club is community-based, include an advertisement in relevant community newsletters. Again, be sure to include your club’s name, your brief mission, and your meeting time and place.

Face-to-face Contact

When doing outreach and recruitment, there is no substitute for personal contact. In fact, most students say they become involved in things by “word of mouth.” Take the time to tell your friends and classmates about your club—it usually makes a lasting impression when someone approaches you face to face!

Table-Top Recruitment

Set up a table with information on your expectations for the club in the upcoming year. If you’re just starting your club, make sure the table-staffers can discuss goals and visions. If you’re advertising for an already existing club, emphasize the great activities you have done in the past.

Always have sign-up sheets available, too. Take down the name and contact information for anyone who shows interest, even if they don’t commit right away. After the first meeting, you will have convinced them to stay!

Be creative. A group of students attracted a big crowd to an initial planning meeting by advertising on sidewalks around campus. New ideas like these can make the difference between a group’s success and failure.

Remember: always check with your school or community’s administration before advertising in public places.
Running an Effective Meeting

Before the Meeting

Remember: A good organizer is inclusive in each and every effort.

- Make sure you have a set location and time for meetings. If possible, pass out a monthly schedule of meetings and events to each member, as well as post the schedule in a public place. Consistency will encourage membership!

- Schedule meetings at convenient times. Afternoon/after-school meetings are easiest for students. To keep attendance high, try to schedule mid-week meetings (Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday).

- Publicize your meetings throughout the school building. Place meeting reminders in the school newspaper, during the morning announcements, or in any other forum that reaches the student body.

During the Meeting

Remember: Good meetings don’t just happen – they are carefully planned.

Meeting Agenda

A clear agenda should be set for every the meeting, then printed and distributed to all members. The goals of the meeting need to be clearly set out by the core group of organizers. Also, you will want the group to understand why there is a need for each and every one of them as members. A campaign loses momentum quickly unless people have a real idea of the nature and importance of their responsibilities to the group.

The Roles

It is a good idea to assign a couple of roles to group members:

- Facilitator: keeps the group on track. Responsibilities include:
  - moving the group along;
  - summarizing what has happened for the group;
  - encouraging as many people as possible to participate in the discussion;
  - ensuring that the discussion remains friendly, focused, and constructive; and
  - when decisions need to be made, making sure the group understands the decision before the group, and that people are comfortable with how the decision has been made.

- Co-facilitator: shares the above duties with the facilitator, and keep s a list of people in the group. Gender-balanced facilitation is often a good idea to avoid domination of discussion by either gender.

- Timekeeper: keeps track of how much time has elapsed in each segment of discussion of a meeting. She should give “time warnings”: halfway mark, 15 minutes left, 5 minutes left, etc. Stick to your time limits; the meeting participants may have other things to do and will appreciate ending at the agreed time.
• Notetaker: takes notes on the main points and makes them available to all that attended and missed the meeting.

Meeting Activities

Decide beforehand what the meeting’s overall goal will be. The meeting should have a flow to it. For example, here’s an idea of how a problem-solving meeting might run:

• Brainstorming session: Have group members throw out strategy idea, with the spokesperson taking notes. The facilitators should remember that this session is open to all suggestions - criticism and clarification will come later.

• Identify realistic strategies: here is where the list becomes condensed. Ask the group to consider each of the points made in turn. Ask the hard question: is this realistic? Do we have the resources? Do we have the time?

• Wrap-Up: Encourage people to make REAL commitments to accomplish the overall goal(s) using one of the suggested strategies.

• Do a MINI-ACTION: You’re a group that does things, right? Spend 10-15 minutes creating posters for an upcoming event, writing letter to the editor/public official about your project, or recycling in your building.

Additional Items

Other ideas for running a smooth, effective meeting:

• Try an icebreaker activity to help bring the group closer together. Introductions are a must, both for old and new members. Activity options include 5-10 games, or a BRIEF roundtable sharing of a recent relevant experience.

• Move steadily through the agenda items, being sure to adhere strictly to time limits. But be sensitive facilitators! Remember, your responsibility is to the group and its work. If an issue needs further discussion, set up a special topic discussion for a future meeting.

• Be visual! Use a flip chart or a writing board to put up your group’s thoughts, discussions, and other items.

• End on upbeat note. Thank all the group members, especially those who took on special roles. The group has done a good job; they should know that.
What’s the Problem?
- What is the toxics/health **problem** you would like to address in your school or community? Define it in simple terms. *Example: There is a lot of litter on the grounds of my school.*

- Think about your problem and list some possible causes of this problem, or things that contribute to this problem, below. *Example: a possible cause of litter is that there are not enough trash receptacles.*

- **Solutions:** After you have listed the causes, think about solutions and write them down below:

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What Are You Going to **DO** About the Problem?

- **Your Project:** Please come up with one possible project or action you could take to address this problem, knowing some of the causes and solutions. This is the project you will plan for the rest of the week.

What is the **goal** of your project? What do you hope to accomplish?

What are the objectives for reaching your goal?

**What do you need to KNOW?**

Has your project been done before?

What **resources do you have?** What **resources do you need?** Determine if the resources that you need are within your group, or whether you need to go outside to get help.

Consider the following:
- People
- Money
- Materials
- Services
- Technical Expertise

List the **resources** you have for your project:
- Resources **within** your group (skills/knowledge):
(1) Resources outside of your group (i.e., who can help you with your project):

Who are the key decision-makers? Which, if any, decision-makers do you need to reach to make your project successful? (e.g., school board members, students, Tribal Council, etc.)

How will you involve others? How will you develop support for your project?
HOW DO WE MAKE IT HAPPEN? Creating an Action Plan

“A Plan is Not a Plan unless it’s written down” ~ Sierra Club

What are the action steps for meeting your objectives and reaching your goal? Identify the tasks you need to complete to reach your goal.

Develop a Timeline:
Once you have all the pieces of a successful project, you need to create a realistic timeline for your project. A timeline is more or less your plan of action that tells the Who, What, and When. Set a start date and end date for the project (when you want to reach your goal), and then work backwards so you know when to plan each action leading up to your goal. A written timeline provides everyone in your group with a clear understanding of what is going to happen and what is expected of each person. You can always change a plan once it’s written, but you need to write it down first!

Soon is not a Time * Some is not a Number * Someone is not a Person

On the next page is a sample template for filling in the timeline on your local conservation project. Review your notes to identify:

- **What Steps/Actions** you are going to take?
- **When** will the project begin and end, and when will each task be completed?
- **How/when** will you celebrate and evaluate?
- **Who will be responsible** for each step?

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Each action should have a deadline, and a person or people responsible for executing the action.

What obstacles might get in your way? How will you deal with these obstacles?
Create Your Message:

Come up with a catchy slogan that tells people what you are doing. When you write a press release about your project, or explain your project to outside audiences, the **problem-solution-action** approach helps you tell an interesting story that people can relate to easily.

**Example:** Anchorage AYEA’s air quality project two years ago had the following message printed on cards: 
“Are you idling your time away?” *(This was the catchy slogan for the project).*

“Anchorage has violated federal air quality standards for 14 of the last 20 years *(problem).*” They then listed three statistics highlighting this problem on the card.

“Please try to refrain from idling and keep Alaska the breathtaking beauty that it is *(solution).*”

“If you would like to know how you can help Anchorage schools curb air pollution, please contact Alaska Youth for Environmental Action *(action).*”

Message:

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**Evaluation, Completion and Celebration!**

**Evaluate Success:** What are **three questions** you can ask to measure your success?

(1)

(2)

(3)

**Celebrate!** How will you **share and celebrate** the success of the project (e.g., media release, press conference, community presentation)? *How will you acknowledge those involved and those who supported the project?*
Different Approaches to Environmental Problem-Solving

You’ve brainstormed some potential solutions to your problem. Now it’s time to choose one solution and make a plan. The following is a list of different approaches to environmental problem solving. Use these examples to help develop your own project.

Educational/Outreach Projects

It is fun to raise awareness on the environment, or help people learn more about a specific topic, by doing a project that celebrates an environmental person or event. Examples of such projects:
- Environmental Art Shows/Recycling Sculptures
- Field trips to Nature Museums or Nature Centers
- Dinners/events that honor famous environmental stewards
- Educational activities/presentations (E.g., Earth Day)

Projects in Research

These projects include scientific/practical research with a “real-life” approach and application. Results can be shared with specific audiences or the general public to promote action (e.g., restoration of an area, implementation of policies, etc.) on an issue. Examples:
- School surveys about recycling practices
- Environmental Audit of a local business
- Water quality monitoring project
- Inventory of trees/plants in a neighborhood

Restoration or Beautification Projects

These projects allow people to get outside, use physical activity, and make visible improvements in the environment in a short-term period. Examples include:
- Building a greenhouse
- Developing/maintaining trails
- Designing a school garden or habitat
- Planting Trees on Arbor Day
- Cleaning up Litter

Civic Action Projects

Like other types of projects, these projects require you to take action to protect the environment. However, unique to this type of project is that it always focuses on an issue—a problem that includes two or more viewpoints as to what the problem is and how it should be solved. There are different breakdowns of action projects:

**Persuasion:** This is used when you are trying to convince someone to take a certain course of action

**Economic Action:** You can also have an impact by purchasing or not purchasing (i.e. boycotting) certain products based on their environmental “friendliness”

**Political Action:** This involves encouraging an elected official or public leader to take action on your issue.
Fundraising

To get your started on fundraising for your school or community club, here are some ideas for possible fundraisers that will also allow you to reach out further into your community.

**Seeking Donations**

This is the most obvious path to take. If you know of individuals in your community who are interested in environmental issues and willing to support you with monetary contributions, you are in luck. A formal letter soliciting funds or asking for a meeting is the best way to start. Impressive presentations to potential donors in your community can literally “pay off” quite well.

Money isn’t the only resource, either. Even if donors can’t provide cash, they may be able to provide you with testing equipment, planting supplies, professional expertise, etc. Focus on what people can provide, not on what they cannot.

**School Support**

Regardless of whether your club is affiliated with the school or not, your school may have student activities funding available for a group like yours. Talk to administrators to determine if you can apply for start-up money.

**Raffles**

Recently, there was a good example of a successful raffle in Washington, DC. To fund a worthwhile environmental education project, a woman ran a “75%-25% Raffle.” 75% of the profits became startup funds for the project, while 25% were pooled and given away as the prize. Your fundraising committee should be able to brainstorm similar ideas. Note: Make sure your school or community allows money-raising efforts like raffles.

**Benefit Events**

These are a lot of work, but often provide a great pay off. They also help form closer ties with your community and can expand your membership base. Encourage people who attend the events to sign up to work with the group. Some examples of benefit events include concerts, fun runs, and Arts and Crafts shows.

**[Your Idea Here]-a-Thon**

The National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness (NSCAHH) organizes a yearly “Hunger Clean Up.” Campus hunger groups garner pledges for every hour of community projects they engage in. The groups then work with other community groups to set up the projects. People repaint housing projects, or clean up a particularly polluted site, or even help rebuild housing. They then collect on the pledges that community members have made, and the group makes a profit. The community’s environment benefits, and the group benefits financially and attracts new members. Other popular ideas include: bike-a-thons, walk-a-thons, hike-a-thons, dance-a-thons, tree plantings, beach clean-ups, adopt-a-streams, etc.
Matching Funds

Often businesses will agree to match the amount of money a group raises at an event. It is often called a “challenge.” You hear this especially with public radio or TV fundraising drives.

In-Kind Contributions

Ask local community groups, churches, and civic clubs for donations or use of resources. For example, there are advocacy groups whose computer equipment was all donated. Art supplies for poster, paper and copies for mailing, food and drinks for events, the use of building space for events - all these are often donated to groups like yours.

Merchandise

A student Madison University in Virginia has developed a fundraising model now used on campuses around the nation. They marketed reusable, environmentally sensible coffee mugs with the group’s logo on them. This raised substantial funds for the group and helped create a wider awareness of the group and the work it was (and still is) doing.

Membership

Try to make it a rule to collect dues from your members, but don’t turn away potential members simply because they can’t pay dues. A sliding scale system is a good way to go to ensure fairness in dues collection.

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These are just some of the ways your group can engage in fundraising efforts. Your Fundraising Committee should be able to brainstorm many more. And always remember something a fellow organizer told groups he worked with: It’s “FUN”draising! Raising money should be a enjoyable experience for group members.

Adapted from the National Wildlife Federation’s Organizer’s Guide.
Letter Writing

There are many methods you can use to get your message across, and letter writing is one of the easiest and most effective. Letter writing serves other important purposes, as well: it helps educate your group and others on the issues, and it can help bring in new membership. Writing letters is a great first step in sharing your opinion with both peers and elected officials!

Letters to the Editor

A letter to the editor is addressed to the editor of a newspaper or other publication with the intent of responding to, correcting, or expanding on a recent story or editorial carried in the publication. The most important technique in letter-writing is to identify your “message,” the fundamental idea you want people to take away from your letter. Following is a recommended outline form for any letter to the editor as well as some tips on writing your letter.

STEP 1: OUTLINE YOUR LETTER

First Paragraph

Refer to coverage or reason for your letter in the first sentence, but don’t waste valuable space by restating what the paper reported incorrectly. For example, you might begin with: "Dear Editor: Your most recent coverage of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge issue was an earnest attempt at covering the bases. However, some important facts were lost in the process...."

State your primary message clearly and concisely.

Second and Optional Third Paragraph

• Reinforce your message in the body of the letter with brief details appropriate to the publication’s typical reader. A letter to the editor submitted to a school newspaper, for example, is going to be different in style and level of detail than one written for Newsweek magazine.
• If you are writing for a local publication, relate your message to issues or areas of concern specific to your school or community.

Closing Paragraph

• Restate your message in a catchy, memorable way.

STEP 2: AS YOU WRITE

What Do They Want?

• Most papers have published guidelines for writing a letter to the editor. Find out what the paper’s preferred format is, and design your letter around it so that it can be easily published.
• Review the letters that have been published by the newspaper or journal in the past and note their characteristics. Does the newspaper usually publish only a brief excerpt of a letter or does it carry the whole piece?
Keep It Simple

- Keep it brief, 2-3 paragraphs, one or two sentences per paragraph, with 200-250 words total.
- Give yourself the advantage by sticking to one or two concisely presented concepts. If the letter is too long or too complicated, it may be discounted or edited, with or without your approval.

Be Accurate

- Avoid the temptation to restate incorrect information or opinions you feel are inaccurate.
- Proofread carefully. Letters with grammar or spelling mistakes are unlikely to be published.
- Check all quotes and facts for accuracy. Your credibility will be damaged if your information is incorrect!

Be Positive

- Avoid the temptation to restate incorrect information or opinions you feel are inaccurate.
- While it is important to correct incorrect information, no one wants to be insulted and chances of getting your letter published decreases with a letter that overly criticizes the publication.
- While what appears in the news may upset or anger you, make sure you focus on the positive. Keep in mind that the tone of your letter will affect how people receive your message.

STEP 3: WHEN YOU’RE DONE

- Sign your letter. Include full name, address and daytime phone number.
- Check out the publication’s web site. Many newspapers have forms on their web sites for submitting letters.
- Send your letter [as the paper specifies; email, fax, or mail] the day the article you are responding to appears or the day following. The more timely your response, the more likely that it will be published.
- Don't send the same letter to more than one paper. The papers want something unique; they don’t want to print a letter that appeared in a competing paper the day before!
- If possible, find out the name of the person who handles letters for the newspaper or magazine and send it directly to him or her. Make a quick follow-up call to make sure it has been received.
Letters to Elected Officials

Our elected officials are accountable to us, and we must communicate our concerns to them. Few decision-makers can ignore outcry from their constituents, and most are genuinely interested in the opinions of the people they represent.

Remember: your letters DO count, they ARE read, and they DO make a difference!

Materials Needed

- Recycled paper and envelopes or pre-written post cards and letters (Note: pre-written letters are not as “politically effective” as hand-written ones.)
- Pen and clipboards. (Idea: set up ironing boards to write on.)
- Sample Letter. Make it simple, short, and to the point.
- Fact sheets to use as background information.

The Letter Itself

- Address decision-makers properly (a rude letter will be recycled at best, and may hurt more than help.)
- If you are referencing specific legislation, identify bills by number. For example, in the U.S. Congress: House bill: H.R. _____, Senate bill: S. _____. If you don’t know the bill number, refer to it by its principal sponsors.
- Officials may not know to which bill you are referring, so include a short summary as well.
- If your official has a good environmental voting record, be sure to commend him/her.
- Use area specific examples to support your position.
- Limit your letter to one topic.
- If possible, use only one page.
- Include your name and address in the body of the letter.
- Ask your legislator to state his or her position on the issues in a reply.
- If you are writing to a legislator other than your own senator or representative, also forward a copy of your letter to your district legislator as a courtesy.
- If you or your group plan on creating a form letter for use as a template, remember to encourage all letter writers to add personal notes.
Holding a Public Letter-Writing Session

If you are interested in generating mass support for an issue, consider holding a public letter-writing session in your school or community. Be sure to get permission from the appropriate officials before setting up a table or booth.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS NEEDED

In addition to the materials listed above, the following materials are useful in public letter-writing campaigns.

- “Butcher block” paper, markers, and tape for making signs to advertise the letter-writing session.
- Donation jar for postage.
- A sign-up sheet for your group. Letter-writing campaigns present great opportunities to recruit new members!

WHEN AND WHERE

When: Find out when traffic around your issue table or booth will be at its height and set up then.

Where: You obviously want locations where you will be highly visible and have a steady flow of people. Student Union, shopping centers, and parks are obvious choices, as well as cafeterias, theaters, lectures or other special events, county fairs, and other church and community functions.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

People will usually need a couple of minutes to read what they are writing about.

Your writers may not know their legislator, so it is helpful to have district maps or lists on hand.

If at all possible, have something that you can give to those who do write letters. Something as simple as a button or a sticker shows the person’s involvement.

Tape a sample letter and the decision-maker’s address to the table in full view.

Collect the letters once they are written and make sure they get sent.

After collecting the letters, send them out in batches. Getting a few letters a day for a week or two on a single issue has a big impact on your legislator.

PEOPLE POWER

It is important to have a couple of people draw folks to your table or booth. Remember to be assertive, polite, and quickly give your “rap.” For example:

“Hi, I’m so-and-so, and we are conducting a letter-writing campaign for [your issue here]. Could you take a couple of minutes to write a letter to your [targeted decision-maker here] on this issue?”
**Eye Catchers**

Spark people’s interest by having a visual display. Successful ideas include showing videos, hosting art exhibits, rallies, musical events, etc. The bottom line is that the more visually interesting your exhibit, the more people you’ll have stopping by.

**Publicizing Your Campaign**

When publicizing your activities, always remember that it helps to have a local angle.

**Important Addresses**

You can write to U.S. Senators and Representatives, the President, Committee Chairs, and other officials who make decisions for the country. Do not underestimate your influence!

**Office of the President or Vice President:**
The President/Vice President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

**To a Representative:**
The Honorable [Name]
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

**To a Senator:**
The Honorable [Name]
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

**To a United States Cabinet Member:**
The Honorable [Name]
Secretary of [Department]
Washington, DC 20301

**To a World Leader:**
(Name of World Leader)
(Country) Embassy
United Nations
United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017

**To state or local authorities or agencies:**
For example:
Florida Game and Fish Commission
620 S. Meridian Street
Tallahassee, FL 32