

Earth Force Strategic Alterations



“Where adults see this as a disruption, and they hope to go back to normal, young people see this as a life-changing moment that demands action.”

Roxie Richner, Michigan High School Student

Young people are living through a time unlike anything any generation has faced before. From the pandemic impacting their day-to-day experiences to climate change muddying their future, young people have ample reason to react with a mixture of anxiety, fear, and foreboding. Yet even in this unstable environment young people are making it clear that they want to make a difference in their communities and that they want to be heard.

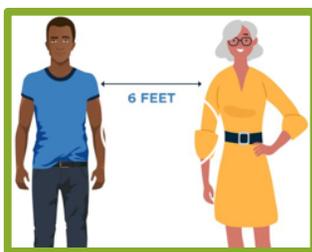


We have spent the last two months determining how we can leverage our experience to ensure that young people have these experiences despite the COVID-19 crisis. Our guiding star in this effort has been our belief in the power of young people to make a difference.

We anticipate that the educational systems (both formal and informal) will face several daunting challenges over the next year including:

Disruptions in Traditional Schooling

We anticipate that school disruptions from the pandemic will continue into the next school year as schools struggle to reopen, are forced to close when hotspots arise, or attempt to implement a mix of distance learning and in-person learning in classrooms. Initially schools were not prepared for a shift to virtual learning and in response, educators have spent the last three months trying to build/find grab-and-go educational options such as videos, worksheets, and online games. As educators adapt to this new “normal” we believe there will be increased interest in using action-based approaches adapted for distance learning.



Social Distancing Disrupts PD

Our traditional model of in-person educator professional development has become impossible in the era of social distancing. First, we are committed to not putting anyone, including our own staff, at risk from the virus. Second, several districts are recommending that educators not attend in-person events this summer. Finally, the partners we rely on have indicated a strong preference to not participate in any events that require travel or in-person meetings over the next six months.

School Finances Under Pressure

This crisis is hitting local communities particularly hard and several economic indicators point to constricted education budgets in the coming year. In the coming years schools will be looking for “off the shelf” programming that can operate in disrupted classrooms.

As we reviewed our 2019/2020 program year, we were struck by two issues. Educators were unprepared to support students in the completion of projects in a distance learning environment. And, the support we were able to supply to educators was limited. These twin challenges forced us to critically review how we support educators and what tools they need to support student-led learning when they are not physically meeting with students. As a result of our review we are making a series of resulting strategic alterations that will drive Earth Force programming for foreseeable future including:

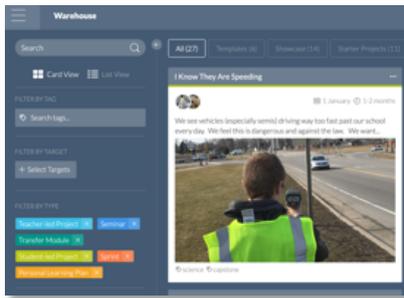
Virtual Educator Professional Development

Many school districts are discouraging educators from attending in-person professional development sessions, we have elected to deliver our educator professional development program virtually. Our plan is to spend May and June developing the training, creating asynchronous training tools (videos, interactive PDFs), testing the tools with educators, and recruiting participants. We will launch this training July 21st.



Redesign Delivery for Distance Learning

Perhaps the most profound alteration is the development of tools that will allow educators to facilitate our program in a distance learning classroom. Earth Force staff members are designing tools that will allow educators to break down tasks to be conducted either individually by students, finding collaboration software that will support student voice, and assessment tools that will allow educators to assess student progress. The resulting package will be available this summer



Virtual Train the Trainers

We currently have a team of staff and consultants to design two train the trainer events. The first will focus on introducing new partners to our approach to student-led action projects. The second will be designed to prepare trainers to provide professional development via virtual platforms. Those events will begin the the week of July 13th. Once designed we believe this platform will allow us to expand the number of organizations we engage each year while limiting the cost of expansion.

Online Marketing

COVID-19 has disrupted our plans to market our fee for service efforts to school systems. Our hope had been to engage schools and educators via a series of conferences. With most of the education conferences canceled we are changing our outreach in two ways: 1) we are working with a pro bono digital marketing consultant to develop an an email and online marketing campaign. We are piloting this model in May of 2020; and 2) we are adding a low-cost option for individual educators. For the first time we will allow individual educators attend an Earth Force professional development session for a small fee.

