



EARTH FORCE

TENFOLD /'ten.föld/



2021-2026 Strategic Plan

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OVERVIEW

TENFOLD /'ten,fōld/

adjective: ten times as great or as numerous

adverb: by ten times; to ten times the number or amount.

goal: grow the number of young people working within civic structures to solve environmental problems by ten times.

This plan, entitled “TenFold”, outlines an aggressive growth strategy to expand Earth Force's reach from 15,000 young people annually to 150,000 young people annually.

This plan is a reaction to the growing environmental problems our communities face. We believe it is critical that young people develop the civic skills necessary to address environmental challenges.

LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

Over the last year the Earth Force board and staff have grappled with how to set the direction of our organization for the future in a world where change is constant. As we write this letter our nation is facing a worldwide pandemic, political polarization, and young people in the streets calling for far-reaching changes to our political and economic systems.

In the midst of all of these disruptions we have been tasked with setting the direction of Earth Force over the next five years. A challenging task, but one that we wholeheartedly embrace.

The document you are reading is the result of hundreds of hours of research, countless meetings, and a concerted effort to listen to the educators, partners, and young people we serve. Through all of that learning four themes consistently rose to the top:

- Youth civic action on environmental issues is our reason for being
- It is imperative that Earth Force grows to reach more young people
- Our growth cannot come at the expense of program quality
- We must “step up” in our journey to ensure that our organization fosters Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

This plan both directs our actions and allows for adaptation as we confront changing landscapes. The focus of our work will be to grow the number of young people engaged in civic action to address environmental issues from 15,000 to 150,000. How we will do that is driven by three focus areas: building a community, funding youth action, and raising awareness.

As you review this plan, please remember that we are always looking for input on how we can achieve these goals. We realize that we are not the only people who want to support young people as they develop their civic muscles and welcome the insights and ideas of fellow believers.

Thank you.

John Vogel Vince Meldrum
Board Chair CEO & President



SUPPORTING EDUCATORS

Earth Force is a national nonprofit organization committed to engaging young people in civic action to improve the environment. For us, that means that young people will **identify** problems in their community, **investigate** the causes of those problems, and **advocate** for changes to the policies and practices that govern the community.

At the core of our work is educator professional development. We have developed a unique professional development model that builds the skills educators need to engage young people in the full arc of environmental action. With our approach, educators learn to move young people from the investigation of environmental issues to engaging with community decision makers to advocate for change.



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"What Earth Force is doing is fundamental to getting kids civically active."

CREATING A MOVEMENT

Earth Force is creating a new branch of environmental education called **Environmental Action Civics** that focuses on young people putting their environmental knowledge to work solving systemic problems.

Environmental Action Civics transforms how environmental education engages with young people to apply their knowledge of environmental issues to make our communities more sustainable.

Environmental Action Civics is a youth-centered, standards-aligned approach that guides students as they learn about their environment and gives them the opportunity to take civic action to address problems they find.

It incorporates five essential experiences:

- Young people learn about the environment within the context of their own lived experiences (where they live, who they are, what they see);
- Young people democratically select an environmental issue to study in partnership with their peers, educator, and community members;
- Young people use credible qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect information about their issue and identify root causes;
- Young people engage each other, their community, and local stakeholders in evidence-based discussion as a means to contextualize the information and deepen their understanding;
- Young people develop action strategies appropriate for addressing the root cause of the problem and, with the support of adults and allies, advocate for those solutions to people in positions of power.

CENTERING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND JUSTICE

Solving environmental problems requires cooperation, most powerfully through local civic engagement. Earth Force embodies the belief that participation in local environmental decision-making is critical to equitable processes, innovative solutions, and enduring democratic and civic skills. We are committed to ensuring that young people whose voices have been historically excluded in environmental decision making have the tools and skills to make their voices heard.

From how we design our programs, to whom we choose to partner with, and how we identify our leadership, Earth Force is committed to centering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice in our work.

Here's how we are changing.

- **Review** – We will complete a full review of our professional development, and classroom materials to ensure that we are preparing educators to elevate the voices of all young people.
- **Focus** – We will expand our engagement of young people living in communities that have been subjected to marginalization.
- **Leadership** – We will create a pathway to organizational leadership that represents the diversity of the young people and educators we engage.

We recognize that this will be a continuing journey that will require us to remain engaged and open to feedback.

We are committed to a process of continual improvement to ensure that our programs meet the needs of young people coming from communities hardest hit by environmental problems.

RETAINING QUALITY

We are proud of our work and the quality of the products that we deliver to educators. We are committed to retaining that quality as we grow.

Here's how we are maintaining quality:

Continuous Evaluation: Earth Force has worked with Brandeis University's Center for Youth and Community for nearly 20 years to develop an evaluation system. We are committed to deploying this system of educator and student surveys, participant interviews, and feedback from partners. Through this system we will generate data to ensure our programming meets the highest quality standards.

Review and Renewal: Earth Force commits to an annual review of data generated from our evaluation system to identify areas for improvement and elevate successful practices. We will continue to engage partners and educators to incorporate their feedback and the results of our evaluation will be the focus of our improvement efforts.

Transparency: Earth Force is committed to being transparent about the evaluation of our programs. Results of our evaluation will be available to our supporters, partners, and anyone interested in integrating civics into their programming.

2026 STRATEGIES

01

BUILD A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

We will increase the number of organizations using Environmental Action Civics to 300, reaching 135,000 young people a year

02

FUND YOUTH ACTION

We will engage 15,000 young people each year in our Challenges

03

RAISE AWARENESS

We will grow Environmental Action Civics into a recognized branch of environmental education



BUILD A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Earth Force is working in partnership with a variety of organizations to create a community of organizations called the Alliance for Environmental Action Civics.

The Alliance is a community of practice committed to ensuring that young people use the tools of democracy to build sustainable communities. Alliance organizations represent a cross section of the environmental education movement including nature centers, zoos & aquaria, educator professional development providers, watershed associations, government entities, and school systems.

Communities of practice create “systems change” by bringing together groups with different perspectives and missions to collaborate. Ours will be built from the work of three teams:



Practice Innovators: The Practice Innovators Team consists of organizations that are implementing Environmental Action Civics. Team focus: Provide feedback on implementation.



Materials Developers: The Materials Development Team consists of organizations that are implementing Environmental Action Civics. Team focus: Develop a series of foundational materials to codify Environmental Action Civics into a field of thought.



Think Tank: The Think Tank consists of individuals in fields adjacent to Environmental Action Civics (civic education, education/civic research, environmental advocacy, and social justice). Team focus: assess the opportunities for Environmental Action Civics in those fields and provide feedback to the other teams.

BUILD A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE – THE HOW

Earth Force serves as the convening organization for the Alliance, the fiscal sponsor, and the coordinator of the work of Alliance teams.

Convening

Earth Force will convene organizations incorporating Environmental Action Civics into their programming. To date we have identified over 40 organizations that provide Environmental Action Civics training to educators in their communities. These organizations will form the building blocks of a community of practice where organizations can come together to share best practices, establish guidelines, and forge a new branch of environmental education.

2026 Goal: 300 organizations will be part of our Environmental Action Civics Alliance and engage 135,000 young people.

Training

Each year Earth Force selects between 10 and 20 organizations to participate in our train-the-trainers program. The training introduces them to the principles of Environmental Action Civics, provides a deep dive into the Earth Force Process as an example, provides materials to support local educator professional development, and gives them access to other practitioners to help them adapt their programs to incorporate civics.

2026 Goal: A total of 110 organizations will have participated in the train-the-trainers program.

FUND YOUTH ACTION

02

Earth Force is working with a series of sponsors to grow our capacity to support and fund youth civic action projects. Earth Force Challenges reach directly to educators and young people.

The goals of the Challenges are to recognize the work of young people, support their projects through implementation funding, and to highlight the impact young people have on communities.

Over the next five years we will launch new Challenges, replicate successful programs in new communities, and grow the funding we have to support youth civic action projects.



FUND YOUTH ACTION – THE HOW

How we will accomplish this goal:

Host Challenges that Address Sustainability Goals

Earth Force is committed to engaging young people in issues that are important for the sustainability of their communities. Our Challenges ask young people to improve watershed health, advance sustainable food systems, and make their communities resilient to climate change. In the future we will identify sustainability issues that young people care about most and offer Challenges in those areas.

Fund Young People

Young people working on sustainability issues need funding to support their projects. Earth Force commits to identifying partnerships that will channel funding to young people who are using civic tools to address local sustainability issues. We are proud to have partnered with a series of sponsors that are willing to work with us to ensure young people have access to funds necessary to implement their projects and will work to bring more sponsors to that effort.

Replicate Successful Programs

Earth Force will replicate local Challenges that have proven successful. Through this effort we will build the capacity of local community partners to deliver civic infused programming, fund local efforts, and create networks of educators prepared to engage young people in civic action.

RAISE AWARENESS

Our strategy to grow by TenFold includes a robust communication campaign that will increase awareness of Environmental Action Civics.

Practitioners

The breadth of leaders who know about Environmental Action Civics is relatively narrow. To expand knowledge about the practice we will need to begin an ongoing communication campaign focused on the successes of programs using this approach.

Federal Agencies

The largest single funder in the environmental education space is the federal government. Earth Force has long been a partner of major federal agencies that are funding environmental education. As Environmental Action Civics develops we will begin to expand our outreach to these agencies concerning the importance and value of incorporating civics into environmental education programming.

Funding Community

Virtually none of the institutional funding for environmental work goes to support civic-infused environmental education. There are a number of institutional giving organizations that support programs adjacent to Environmental Action Civics such as civic education, environmental advocacy, nature education, and outdoor education. Few, if any, of these organizations have a meaningful understanding of Environmental Action Civics, how it could address their goals, or who is supporting the model. Earth Force is committed to engaging these funding communities in conversations about Environmental Action Civics.

THANK YOU

Our strategic planning was a deeply collaborative process among our staff, Board of Directors, and the people we serve.

Thank you for your investment in building a civically engaged generation.

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