

Section One

Starting or Revitalizing a School Environmental Club

Why Organize a School Environmental Club?

Psychologist Carl Rogers wrote: "How can I create a psychological climate in which that child will feel free to be curious, will feel free to make mistakes, will feel free to learn from the environment, from fellow students, from me, for experience. How can I help him recapture the excitement of learning that was natural in infancy?"

Why not create this kind of climate by organizing a school environmental club? Young people can learn about the environment by exploring areas of interest beyond what is offered in your school curriculum. This guide is designed to help you organize or revitalize a student environmental group at your school.

Schools throughout Wisconsin have organized groups of students who have as their focus an interest in and concern for the environment. By becoming involved in projects in their schools and community, they acquire skills to identify, investigate, and contribute to the resolution of environmental issues and problems. Students learn the concept of community service by working together to make a community a better place to live and they have fun as they explore their environment through recreational and service projects in communities.

Here are some of the responses from club advisors about the purpose for their school's environmental club.

- To provide students with the opportunity to learn more about their surroundings, participate in service projects at school and in the community.
- To promote environmental awareness and develop social and life skills.
- To increase student awareness of environmental issues and give them power to make change.
- To provide opportunities for students to become directly involved in a variety of projects relating to the environment.
- To promote environmental awareness and empower students to take action and work toward building a sound environmental ethic.

School environmental clubs can be a means of promoting environmental literacy. Clubs provide an avenue for students to acquire skills needed to identify, investigate, and experience the resolution of environmental issues and problems. Interested students have access to environmental education beyond what is infused into the curriculum.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) developed a curriculum guide in 1985 (second edition 1994) to help Wisconsin schools write their environmental education curriculum. This publication, called "A Guide to Curriculum Planning in Environmental Education," stated the goal of environmental education as follows:

"The goal of environmental education is to help students become environmentally knowledgeable, skilled, dedicated citizens who are willing to work, individually and collectively, toward achieving and maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between the quality of life and the quality of the environment."

The objectives for environmental education as outlined in the Wisconsin curriculum guide are taken and modified from the 1977 Tbilisi International Conference on Environmental Education.

The objectives are:

- **Awareness:** Helping student acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its problems; developing the ability to perceive and discriminate among stimuli; process, refine and extend these perceptions; and use this new ability in a variety of contexts.
- **Knowledge:** Helping students acquire a basic understanding of how the environment functions, how people interact with the environment, and how issues and problems dealing with the environment arise and how they can be resolved.
- **Attitudes:** Helping student acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation and commitment to participate in environmental maintenance and improvement.
- **Skills:** Helping students acquire the skills need to identify, investigate, and contribute to the resolution of environmental issues and problems.
- **Participation:** Helping student acquire experience in using their acquired knowledge and skills in taking thoughtful, positive action toward the resolution of environmental issues and problems.

To insure greater literacy, Wisconsin legislation required each public school district to develop, implement, and evaluate a K-12 sequential curriculum to infuse environmental education into subjects being taught.

How to Organize a Club in your School

Knowing Your School and Community

You may want to get one or two other staff members and a small group of students together to help plan for starting an environmental club in your school. Here are some questions you will want to consider:

- How have other groups organized in your school?
- Is there funding for clubs?
- Do you need a certain number of interested students?
- What other environmental groups exist in your community?
- What support can these groups give?
- What are the major environmental problems in your school or community?

It may be helpful to consult with other club advisors in your school to learn about their experiences in organizing a club. Consult with an administrator to learn how to “officially” start groups in your school. Identify possible community resource people and agencies.

Presenting Your Environmental Club to School Administration

You will want to write a proposal for your environmental club outlining your group’s purpose, potential activities, and group’s needs from administration. Advisor(s) should then arrange a meeting with school administration to present your proposal and find out about school policies and guidelines regarding extracurricular activities. For safety and liability concerns, you will want to find out about requirements for taking students out of the building for activities. After obtaining support from school administration, you are ready to begin organizing your group.

Planning for the Basic Organizational Structure of Your Organization

It may be most efficient to include a small group of students and the advisor(s) of the club in the organization of the basic structure that can be proposed to members at the first meeting. Be sure not to set anything in stone until the entire group can vote on it.

Your proposed organizational structure may include a charter, statement of club purpose, membership qualifications, amount of dues, meeting times, possible activities, club mascot or logo, and explanation of the duties of elected officers and the election process.

Recruiting Members

Answer the question: Why would someone want to join this group? Are there students interested in becoming directly involved in a variety of projects? Can documented active club involvement be “extra credit” in science class? Can community service for the environmental club count toward high school requirements, scout merit, etc. Motivation for joining your club may be different for different students, and reasons for joining your club should be part of all the outreach you do.

The first step is to plan a kick-off meeting for your club. General publicity could include posters, table tents on cafeteria tables, notices on classroom chalkboards, announcements on the public address system, or have interested students give short announcements in classrooms followed by a signup sheet for students who are interested in joining. Include the time and place of your kick-off meeting with all publicity.

The Kick-off Meeting

The kick-off meeting is the first event for the group. Plan a time when the most students can attend and that can stay the same each week or every other week. Check with other co-curricular activities for meeting time conflicts. Reserve a room that you think will be a little small. When you pack a room, it creates a sense of excitement. If possible, arrange to have refreshments at your meeting, as food is a motivator for attendance.

One of the planners should give a brief introduction to the group. Planners should present the proposed organizational structure and ideas for club activities as suggestions. Assign a facilitator and an official note-taker for this first meeting.

It is important that everyone feel that they are involved in the decision-making process and that they have a personal stake in the group. Ask everyone to brainstorm what they envision for the club, such as possible activities or field trips. Your group may choose to

draw from the following list of suggestions. Also, see page 8 of this guide, *Ideas for Environmental Education Involvement in Wisconsin*.

- Develop a nature trail on school grounds
- Present a panel discussion and debate on a controversial issue
- Create a skit, slide show, or video
- Present environmental tips of the week on the public address system or bulletin board
- Establish an environmental library
- Invite guest speakers
- Letter writing campaigns
- Cleanups
- School-wide recycling
- Field trips
- Community service projects
- Poster contest
- Environmental career day
- Environmental quiz bowl

You may want to give students until the next meeting to start thinking about your group's official name. Then, plan to vote on the name of the club, organizational structure, officers, and activities at the next meeting.

At the end of the kick-off meeting, agree on the time for the next meeting. Weekly or bi-weekly meetings work well for active groups. Propose to meet at the same time next week or in two weeks. Then have an informal vote on the time of your next meeting.

Planning Meetings

Have the meetings on the same day and time every week or every other week. Discuss and plan agendas with student officers ahead of time so that officers know what decisions need to be made by the group. Students should go away feeling that they have learned something, accomplished something, have gotten a new project underway, or all three.

At the first "official" meeting, vote on the proposed organizational structure, club name proposals, and plan for the election of officers. Distribute the list of potential activities generated from the first meeting. Set up a committee of students for organizing and

planning with the help of the advisor(s). The committee can come to the next meeting with a proposed calendar of activities for the entire school year.

Promoting your Environmental Club

Advertising club activities not only keeps members informed about upcoming activities, but it promotes an awareness of environmental issues and activities that your club is involved with. Advertising gives your environmental club visibility and gives recognition to students involved in worthwhile activities. Promote your club in the school yearbook, a school newspaper column, club newsletter, create posters, send press releases to your local newspaper, and send memos to the school board and school administration and staff. Design T-shirts that are only worn by members on meeting days or at club events.

Funding for Club Projects and Field Trips

Unless your club receives sufficient funding as part of the school budget, you will need to seek funding sources to carry out the activities of the club. Club dues and student fees for field trips may be necessary, especially for newly formed clubs. Another option is fundraising which can take many forms such as the sale of T-shirts or reusable cups, hosting a school dance with the proceeds targeted for a specific club activity, holding a yard or garage sale of “recycled” items, making things to sell such as birdhouse, bird feeders, greeting cards and stationery, and cloth shopping bags.

Consider applying for federal, state, and private grants. See page 24 of the next section, *Activities for Environmental Involvement in Wisconsin* for a list of grant sources.

Moving Forward

As your group continues to work, students will move from focusing on changes in personal practices and move toward taking action in your community to protect the environment. The next section, *Activities for Environmental Involvement in Wisconsin* is a listing of successful ideas to help you pursue projects with your students, which will help them move toward environmental action.