



Youth Vs. Apocalypse

youthvsapocalypse.com

This guide offers a successful and stepwise model for you to replicate in your community. It is part of a series featuring the award-winning programs from the finalists of the American Climate Leadership Awards 2021 by ecoAmerica.

PURPOSE

Youth Vs. Apocalypse (YVA) builds the climate movement by supporting frontline youth to be leaders and to solve the issues they face. By teaching how climate connects with their lived experiences, and how they can bring their whole selves to collective action, **youth who have never considered themselves “into politics” find a place in this movement.** Youth and communities benefit by building their skills, self-worth, and community engagement, while contributing to the movement our world needs.

DESCRIPTION

YVA was founded by a group of youth and one teacher from Oakland, CA, urging city council members not to approve a coal terminal in a low-income, polluted community of color. **The response from youth, elected officials, and the media quickly demonstrated the viability and power of school-based, youth-led organizing around intersectional climate justice issues.** These results pushed YVA to continue providing education and a space for frontline youth to organize, and to expand our ability to do so. We now connect frontline youth throughout the area to act collectively and stand in solidarity with other actions, and movements.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Our work amplifies the voices of 10 to 19 year olds on the frontlines, and relies on community organizing in schools, so it can be replicated in any district. It may be most transformational where **students are dealing with multiple challenges and may not have felt welcomed in the climate movement.**

GOALS

1. To diversify and grow the climate movement by reaching out and supporting the leadership of young people, in particular BIPOC youth. **Frontline youth have important perspectives on solutions and are key to building a mass movement — yet many have not yet felt welcomed into the climate movement.**
2. Build popular cultural support for bold climate action and promote the understanding that climate justice and social justice are mutually dependent. YVA aims to help define the climate crisis as an urgent and actionable issue for oppressed communities, even where the crisis has been previously ignored.



- To achieve concrete climate and pollution policy changes that take into account all communities and not just dominant cultures.** We know that we must see a major shift in a short period of time, to turn course on the escalation of disaster and injustice through climate change.

PRIMARY COMPONENTS OR ACTIVITIES

YVA is developing a powerful network of frontline youth leaders: Over **35,000 youth and adult supporters taking action at YVA-initiated opportunities, 2,000 students engaged in school presentations, over 100 student leaders trained in depth through annual fellowships, school clubs founded and supported in 10 schools, 16 youth leaders** taking responsibility for organizational priorities and leadership as members of Youth Lead Circle.

IMPACT & OUTCOMES

YVA is Changing the Narrative Around Climate Change and Climate Justice: Over 90 earned media profiles of YVA actions and members, 7 Op-Eds published in local, national and international press written by frontline youth working with YVA, over **50,000 views of YVA climate justice music videos on livestreams and social media.**

YVA is affecting policy: After meeting with youth, Senator Feinstein dropped her weakened version of the Green New Deal; after creative actions at the Democratic Convention, many politicians pledged not to take fossil fuel money; after protests and op-eds, BlackRock took steps forward on climate; after youth action, CA state treasurer Fiona Ma spoke out for fossil fuel divestment; after youth testimony, the East Bay rejected an unsafe power plan and increased community benefits, and Oakland passed a Climate Action Plan with amendments YVA supported.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

- Find people to work with: 1-2 young people, and at least one person with flexible hours during the school day. Work to educate yourselves on how climate change connects with social justice issues. Youthvsapocalypse.org has many resources for this.
- Talk with local environmental justice groups and community members to **identify an issue that connects with climate and justice in which organizing can have an impact.** YVA started by organizing against a coal terminal, but your local community may be dealing with other issues, or your local representatives may be voting against justice and sustainability.
- Begin to recruit for your campaign, not by simply posting meetings online, but by making it personal, and inviting people who may not yet think of themselves as climate activists. Is there an open-minded teacher who will let you present in class? An after school program or a youth leadership group?



4. Use social media to personalize the action. Make personal video posts and tag people who might be interested. Share messages from your page on your own social media. **Give people ways to get involved.**
5. Start your campaign meetings, develop a strategy, think through goals and tactics, make sure **everyone is welcome and everyone has a role that matters** and that they feel good about.
6. Get creative: **Build on the strengths and passions of the people in your group** to tell a powerful story in a powerful way, and be strategic about how this can pressure power holders. Dance, rap, paint, play your music. For young people, join our annual fellowship.
7. No one is disposable. Everyone is a potential organizer. Grow your campaign by supporting people to lead, to organize their own contacts, and make alliances with others. Get to know the people you work with. **Connect with other youth organizations, environmental justice groups and labor groups to learn how you can collaborate.**
8. Recognize that privilege allows for flexibility, rather than ordaining leadership. For adults or others with social and economic privilege, use that to supplement your efforts, i.e., to **meet young people where they are**, to check in, and to offer tangible support. Check for organizing structures that challenge social hierarchies. Be public and explicit about using these. Who talks the most in your meetings? Is everyone listened to?
9. **Crowdfunding for your campaign is a great way to get started with fundraising.** As you grow, you may want to apply for grants to allow people to spend more time devoted to your group. You can find a local non-profit to serve as a fiscal sponsor to hold grant funding and allow you to distribute it.
10. To manage your project, it is essential to keep re-evaluating how young people are being supported to lead and how your organizing respects and empowers frontline leadership. Keep growing, keep taking care of yourselves and each other, **be in it for the long haul, let your activism feed you.**

