



AMERICAN CLIMATE
LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Earth Charter Indiana

EarthCharterIndiana.org

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

In climate-quiet states like Indiana, ECI has been effective in advancing climate action through grassroots organizing that combines education with policy adoption. Our programs empower youth at the juncture of climate science, climate justice and civic advocacy, pairing them with adults to achieve intergenerational climate progress: E.G, we have led or catalyzed seven Indiana cities to pass youth-led climate policy, with more municipalities on the way in 2021.

DESCRIPTION

ECI formed in 2001 to celebrate and amplify the global Earth Charter, which provides a blueprint to connect humanity's great challenges — democratic transparency, racism, poverty, and the climate crisis — into a holistic approach to solutions. Over 20 years, we've become one of Indiana's strongest statewide grassroots effort to advance climate action. Our work has brought Republicans and Democrats together to face the climate crisis.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Our programs would be effective anywhere, but especially in climate-quiet states where elected officials — municipal, county, state — are moving too slowly on climate action. We activate youth alarmed by the climate emergency to take effective action by focusing on their local governments and other leaders.

GOALS

- 1. Education:** We work directly with schools and host climate camps to empower youth about the climate emergency. We develop peer-to-peer and near-peer opportunities for youth to educate each other — and adults. Additionally, we created a climate literacy toolkit for teachers and parents: teachclimate.org.



2. **Action:** Indiana leads the country in the number of youth-led climate resolutions for municipalities (seven). We engage cities and counties in climate action, assisting in greenhouse gas inventories, climate action planning and ordinance development. We aspire to region-wide resilience projects, eventually becoming statewide.
 3. **Unity:** By leveraging the moral persuasive power of youth, we can achieve bi-partisan progress, leaving behind bickering and paralysis. Training youth to be respectful educators on climate, climate justice and civic advocacy, we aspire to transcend false dichotomies and come together to address the climate emergency.
1. **Resilient Schools:** Through our Thriving Schools Challenge program we fund schools up to \$6000 to enact circular economy, systems-thinking, sustainability projects, such as school gardens, LED conversion and zero waste cafeterias. We provide stipends for school champions to assist these youth-led projects.
 2. **Climate Camps:** Our camps combine science, advocacy, art and nature connection into a holistic, empowering program — both weeklong and single day experiences. Youth, aged 5-18 years old, enjoy vegan-eating, yoga, creek stomps, zero waste action, and STEM activities; overall, our camps serve as incubators for many of our programs.
 3. **Climate Leadership Summit:** We are Indiana's only organization to hold an annual summit for Indiana mayors and city officials to educate on climate impacts and solutions. This bi-partisan experience features plenaries, workshops and calls-to-action.
 4. **Resiliency Coordinators:** This program enables us to be truly statewide in scope. We contract with local activists to advance ALL our programs. This contractor (RC) is in the best position to know how to achieve our goals at their local level. We have nine RCs and are expanding.

Four years ago, only one or two Indiana municipalities were dealing with the climate crisis. We now have over three dozen cities engaged in some phase of climate action: Greenhouse Gas inventories (as part of a program with our partner Environmental Resilience Institute), climate action planning, climate resolution adoption, climate ordinances implemented. Moreover we are taking our program to the county level, with four counties engaged in the activities mentioned above. The number of cities and counties currently engaged represents over 43% of the state population. Through our RC program, we have created a true statewide network of activists ready to help each other develop and implement their strategies, including assisting a group of high school youth who call their group Confront the Climate Crisis.

PRIMARY COMPONENTS OR ACTIVITIES

IMPACT & OUTCOMES

**STEP-BY-STEP
GUIDE**

1. Form a statewide effort based on a strong foundational philosophy. For us, it is the Earth Charter. We began in 2001, and were incorporated as a 501C3 by 2004. This non-for-profit status enables us to receive grants from funders.
2. Expand statewide through existing activist networks. Focus on youth: they have the moral persuasive powers to inspire joyful and effective action.
3. Create educational platforms: climate camps, schools, home school organizations, scout troops, church youth teams, after-school programs. Create bold ambitious programs to develop systems- and critical-thinking activities.
4. Climate Recovery Resolutions galvanize intergenerational action at the municipal level. Identify cities that are climate-stagnant, and create youth-led groups, assisted by adult activists to engage mayors and city councils in crafting climate planning.
5. Go local: Any time you can use local resources, such as a local college or university's climate research, do so. It will create a shared sense of identity.
6. Continue to create fun and powerful programming to involve more and more participation. For example, we've created a Youth Ambassadors program for youth, 10 and under, and a Youth Environmental Press Team for high school journalists.