

Sierra Youth Coalition



GROUP KIT

.....

- How can we form an environmental group?
- How can it operate?
- How do we design a campaign?
 - How can we get publicity and funds?
- How do we inspire people to act on these issues?

Cover printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper; inside pages printed on 100% recycled paper, 80% post-consumer.

For more information contact the Sierra Youth Coalition at:

Sierra Club of Canada
1 Nicholas Street, suite 406
Ottawa, ON K1N 7B7
888.790.7393
613.241.1615
info@syc-cjs.org
www.syc-cjs.org

The Sierra Youth Coalition Group Kit Copyright
©2003 Sierra Youth Coalition



This print version of the Sierra Youth Coalition Group Kit has been adapted from the original on-line version, written by Maya Walters, SYC 2001 Summer Intern.



The Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to protecting BC's wildlands and wildlife. To learn more about us, visit www.sierraclub.ca/bc or write to: 302 - 733 Johnson St. Victoria, BC V8W 3C7. Phone: (250) 386-5255.

Sierra Youth Coalition GROUP KIT

Table of Contents



Introduction

About this Group Kit 2

About the Sierra Youth Coalition 2

Organizing A Local Group 4

Forming and Maintaining a Group 4

Meetings and Meeting Space 8

Consensus Decision-Making 11

Ongoing Evaluation 14

Planning For Turnover 14

Creating a Campaign 16

Holding a Planning Retreat 16

Campaign Basics 17

Capacity Considerations 19

Implementation Strategy 20

Measuring Success 28

Solution and Project Ideas 29

Bioregionalism 30

Sustainable Communities 34

Education For Sustainability 37

Lifestyle Simplicity 40

INTRODUCTION

.....

About this Group Kit

This kit is designed to help you successfully organize an environmental group in your school or community, and to show what your group, in partnership with the Sierra Youth Coalition national network, can do to address environmental issues.

There are three main sections to this group kit:

- 1. Organizing a Local Group**, shows you how to organize a skillful, efficient group that is capable of making a significant impact. This is a good starting-point for new groups, as well as a valuable review for those that are already formed.
- 2. Creating a Campaign**, outlines the steps that your group must consider in order to run a successful environmental campaign. This cannot be a complete reference, but we've tried to highlight as many points as we can — for certain topics, you'll probably want to consult further sources for more in-depth information.
- 3. SYC's Solutions and Project Ideas** is the title of the third section. You'll find that there is no information on specific environmental problems in this booklet. This information exists in no shortage elsewhere, and nearly everyone is familiar with the broad issues we are facing. SYC chooses instead to focus on solutions, and in this section we highlight our set of four complementary themes that together address the root causes of many environmental problems. Your group is encouraged to adopt these four solutions and structure your activities with these ideas in mind.

About the Sierra Youth Coalition

Sierra Youth Coalition is the youth-run branch of the Sierra Club of Canada. We are a national, youth driven, and diverse non-profit organization. Through grassroots action, SYC aims to address globalization, consumption, and climate change through a solutions based approach of promoting bioregionalism, sustainable communities, education for sustainability, and lifestyle simplicity. Since its inception in 1996, SYC has acted as a networking and resource centre for youth between the ages of 15-30, concerned about environmental and social justice issues.

SYC's staff and volunteer Executive Committee members activate the membership of approximately 1,600 youth by involving them in

projects, internships, workshops, conferences, and campaigns. All SYC initiatives are aimed at educating youth about sustainability and the environment, while training them to become active citizens. Over the years SYC has been involved in assisting groups at the local, regional and national level to become actively involved in major environmental issues that directly affect their lives, and those around them.

The Sierra Youth Coalition works much like a living cell, and all parts are important to keep the organization functioning. However, the Excomm members are the “official” decision makers. It is the duty of the Excomm to consult members and associate members to ensure the decision-making processes remain grassroots. The Excomm is also elected by SYC members.

The National Coordinator (NC) is hired to carry out decisions made by the Excomm and ultimately the members. The main role of NC is to fundraise, coordinate national programs and campaigns, and support members, local groups, and Regional Coordinators (RCs).

RCs act as a catalyst for action in their region. They form the link between SYC groups, National SYC, and the Sierra Club of Canada creating a comprehensive SYC network. They provide support to groups and members, pass on campaign and program information, coordinate regional SYC campaigns, answer questions, offer advice, and outreach to new youth and students.

Groups are the strength of the SYC. Our groups are concerned youth that come together to take action on local, national, and international environmental issues. Members may form an official SYC group with at least two official SYC members (only two members have to pay dues). Any other youth/students in the group are considered Associate SYC members. Associate SYC members are included in the number of SYC members and can be active in SYC campaigns, events, and activities under the SYC name. They can be added to the SYC email list and submit articles for the homepage or regional zines. Associate SYC members are not considered Sierra Club members and can not vote in SYC or Sierra Club elections unless they become paid members. They will not receive regular SYC or Sierra Club mail-outs but should get the information through their group. Active and non-active Associate member names should be registered with the national office.





ORGANIZING A LOCAL GROUP

This section is about attracting new people and involving them in your activities. We describe the keys to creating a group that benefits from each member's input, rather than falling back on its lowest common denominator. With the information in this section, you'll see how to recruit and maintain members, make decisions with the whole group, and make sure that the group can withstand changes in leadership over time. Understanding the basics in this section will give your group the capacity to launch a successful environmental campaign.

Forming and Maintaining a Group

Membership and Support

No doubt about it, we want to sign up new members. Like most social movements, we don't have any cash, so our power is in our people!

- Here are some suggestions for increasing your membership:
- **1.** Ask people to come out for your cause, but make sure you also
- appeal to people's self-interest. Find out if your campaign will
- directly affect their lives. Will the group give people
- companionship? A good resume? Excitement?

- **2** Keep asking — whenever your group is in contact with people
- (signing petitions, listening to presentations, visiting your table)
- talk about the issues and also what they can do to help.
- **3** Recruit to an activity, not to a meeting. Asking people to come to
- meetings doesn't work nearly as well as getting people doing
- something right away instead of just talking.
- **4** Have simple projects ready to roll. Newcomers may feel
- intimidated if there are only complicated issues and activities with
- a high learning curve. Get them out attending your petition table
- or designing a poster with information you give them. Gradually
- teach them and get them feeling a part of the group.
- **5** Follow up with people. Get back to them when you say you will,
- or just before an event. They'll be impressed since so many people
- get lost in the shuffle. If you worked on turnout for an event, try
- to free yourself from logistical responsibilities on that day, so you
- can pay attention to the new people.
- **6** Never let a volunteer leave a meeting without something to do.

Positions for Group Members

When people join up, it's important to give them an official position within the group. Otherwise, they'll be unsure about their role and probably won't contribute as much as they could. Too many members with no designated roles will make your group disorganized and less efficient.

When people first join, conduct an informal interview to find out what they're most interested in doing. What are their skills and experiences? Are there any positions that they really don't want to take? Preferably, these initial meetings should occur one-on-one between a group leader and the new member; giving every new member a bit of individual attention can really help them settle into the group. When deciding on their position, keep in mind both what they're most interested in working on, and what will be most beneficial for your group.

Having people to fill all the key positions can really help keep your group on track. For example, if you have a designated journalist who hasn't had any work in the past few months, it's a good indicator that it's time to write a newsletter or press release to keep

the media and the public updated on your actions. No material for a press release? This indicates that your group should plan more carefully, to make the next few months more productive than the last. If everyone with a designated role is keeping busy, you can be confident you're doing well.

Here are some suggested roles for group members:

Chairperson The chair is responsible for the overall functioning and maintenance of the group. The chair usually schedules meetings, designates meeting facilitators and notetakers, and makes sure that new volunteers are being welcomed into the group. The chair can also act as a contact person and liaison between your group and the SYC national office.

Guiding Members
(at least three) These people should be especially imaginative and conscious of your group's capacity. They are responsible for brainstorming ideas and acting as a catalyst for your group's activities. Of course, everyone in the group will, ideally, contribute suggestions and ideas, but in reality it's often hard for people to generate useful ideas from scratch. Your team of guiding members will make sure that you always have projects in the works. The guiding members develop preliminary plans and suggestions for your group's direction, and brainstorm activities that contribute to your group's overall goals. They should get together before your regularly scheduled meetings, so they can arrive with their suggestions and jumpstart the discussion. Many groups do not have guiding members, and still function just fine. However, guiding members can be a big help in spearheading action and keeping your group on the right track. Remember that they don't have any more control over the group's activities than anyone else — they are just responsible for thinking up ideas. Other group members are always free to turn down these ideas, or come up with ideas of their own.



Spokespersons
(two or three) Spokespersons deliver your group's message to the public. First and foremost, your spokespersons need to be well-informed and committed to the projects you are working on. Try to have several "public faces" for your group. If the public always sees the same person delivering your message, your project will seem easier to

discount as one person's personal campaign. People are more likely to identify with your cause if they can identify with the spokesperson, so if possible, try to have spokespersons that represent the diversity of your group. These people should also keep the group's media list up to date. (*See "Media and Communication" section.*)

Fundraiser/Treasurer This job could be divided among several people, depending on how much funding your group needs to raise. The fundraiser/treasurer is responsible for keeping up your group's books, writing budgets for your projects, and locating individual donors, awards programs, government initiatives, and other potential sources of cash.

However, he or she should never be expected to do the actual fundraising all alone — that is a big job and should be shared by your whole group.

Journalist Any time your group needs to write a press release, an announcement, or even text for a poster, you should have a designated journalist you can count on. This person should have excellent writing skills, and be able to work closely with the spokespersons. Your journalist can also maintain your group's website if he/she has the necessary skills.

Meeting Facilitator Each time your group meets, you'll need somebody to facilitate the meeting (leading the group through your agenda, keeping the conversation on topic, etc.). This can be a rotating position (a different facilitator for each meeting) or it can be more permanent, if a particular person is especially good at this job. The important thing is to designate a facilitator well before the meeting actually occurs, so he or she has time to prepare. The facilitator should work closely with the chairperson to schedule and plan meetings, as well as with the guiding members to establish goals for each meeting and make sure that the meeting will contribute to your group's development. (*See "Meetings and Meeting Space" below.*)

Notetakers/Historians/Resource People This job can be divided up if your group is very large. The notetaker is responsible for taking minutes during your meetings and then sending them out to group members. He or she also keeps a group

Meetings and Meeting Space

scrapbook or 3-ring binder, which is an archive of all press releases your group has put out, photocopies of newspaper articles about your group's activities, fundraising requests, minutes from all your meetings, photos from your social events, etc. (*See "Planning for Turnover" below.*)

Inefficient meetings kill the enthusiasm of far too many groups. Quick, efficient, decisive meetings create an amazing sense of power and cohesion.

Facilitators and Agendas

An agenda outlines all the things you want to talk about at one meeting. Preparing an agenda ahead of time is important to make sure the meeting starts on time and with the right focus. At the beginning of the meeting, you might want to copy the agenda onto a whiteboard so that everyone can immediately see everything that needs to be discussed.

To keep your group focused, a one- to two-hour time frame for the meeting is recommended. Next to each item on your agenda, the facilitator or timekeeper should note suggested time limits for the discussion on that topic.

As you go through the items on your agenda, write people's names next to tasks they agree to work on. In order to keep your group's momentum, a meeting should be designed to get commitment. Try to make sure that everyone leaves with something concrete to accomplish for the next week, even if it is a small task.

- Here's an example of a meeting agenda for one group in the
- middle of a project:
- **1.** Greetings or introductions and "energizer" activity (a story, a
- simple game, etc....) — 5 minutes
- **2.** Update on the group's actions (an overall update from one
- facilitator, or personal updates) — 5 minutes
- **3.** Outline of agenda and meeting goals (*see next section*)
- — 5 minutes

- **4. T-shirt project: approve design, organize silk-screening —**
- **5 minutes**
- **5. Partnership with community environmental group: discuss**
- **pros and cons, decide on action — 15 minutes**
- **6. Public workshop: decide on content, arrange training for**
- **facilitators — 10 minutes**
- **7. Snacks — 10 minutes**
- **8. Fundraising Dinner: decide on location, designate people in**
- **charge of food donations — 10 minutes**
- **9. Classroom Presentations: decide on content, designate people**
- **to contact professors — 15 minutes**
- **10. Newspaper Ads: review and approve prepared text — 5 minutes**
- **11. Wrap-up, review of newly assigned tasks, and designation of**
- **facilitator for the next meeting — 5 minutes**

Meeting Goals

Don't plan your agenda until you've decided on the goals for your meeting! What needs to be decided, what actions need to be planned, and what work needs to be done to build your organization? These objectives can be worked out between the chairperson and the meeting facilitator. Then, next to each item on your agenda, be sure to write down the objective of the discussion. Having a meeting shouldn't be a goal in itself, and a meeting designed to simply "educate people" is usually ineffective. Plan your meetings so they will result in effective actions.



People are unlikely to come up with lots of groundbreaking ideas during a meeting. Most people like to think about ideas on their own before discussing them with the whole group. Asking everyone for their general ideas won't usually result in the most interesting responses. Instead, present people with several choices or preliminary plans, which can be changed or expanded. Meetings are far more productive when people are given some initial material to work with, rather than asked to come up with ideas from scratch.

Meeting Follow-up

Following up on your meeting is just as important as planning it. Without effective follow up, all the decisions made at the meeting will be at least temporarily forgotten, and people's enthusiasm will wane.

- Here are some follow-up suggestions:
- **1.** Make sure that the notetaker prepares the meeting notes quickly, and sends them out to group members.
- **2.** If possible, phone any active members who missed the meeting to update them on the decisions that were made.
- **3.** Phone to thank any people who made the meeting especially successful or enjoyable, such as someone who brought homemade snacks.
- **4.** Phone any people who came to your group's meeting for the first time, thank them for coming, and ask if any questions have come up since the meeting.
- **5.** Make sure that the work you agreed to accomplish at the last meeting is accomplished before the next meeting!

Meeting Space

The place where you meet can have a surprising effect on how much you accomplish at the meeting. Try to find a room where you can meet regularly. It creates a great atmosphere if you have a space that you can decorate with appropriate posters, your own strategy charts, timelines, potted plants, etc. Just being surrounded by these posters and resources can be inspiring, and it will enable your group to work much more efficiently. Meeting in a student lounge or other public place is usually much harder — besides the distraction and random availability of seating; you will not be able to create as much of a personalized space.



Consensus Decision-Making

It's helpful for any group to choose a decision-making method. Some groups make decisions by democratic vote or by compromise. These methods are convenient in many situations, but they lead to decisions that can threaten to divide the group: in a democratic vote, a significant minority could be deeply opposed to the decision, and in a compromise, the final decision might not please anybody.

Consensus decision-making is a useful (but still imperfect) alternative. In this process, no decision can be made unless everybody is willing to accept it. Through an open exchange of ideas, the group works to find a solution that is acceptable to everyone. It is crucial to have an impartial facilitator to lead the consensus decision-making process.

- There are many different models of consensus decision-making,
- but the basic procedure is as follows:
- **1.** The decision that needs to be made is defined and stated clearly.
- **2.** Brainstorm possible solutions. Don't pass any judgment — write down everything that is suggested. Remember that there are many ways to generate ideas that can be more fun than traditional brainstorming. Playing a game or having a period of silence in which to think about things might work better for your group than just shouting out ideas to the facilitator.
- **3.** Discuss the options that have been presented. Group similar suggestions together. Modify, clarify, and expand on ideas, developing them into more detailed proposals. Eliminate the least realistic suggestions.
- **4.** Develop a short-list of proposals, and state each one clearly. Make sure that everybody is content with this list of proposals.
- **5.** Discuss the pros and cons of each proposal. Make sure that everybody has a chance to contribute. If it's helpful, write down all benefits and disadvantages of each proposal on a chart. Try to come to an agreement on which proposal is the best overall.
- **6.** If there is a major objection, continue to discuss. Try to incorporate small changes to help address objections. This is the most time-consuming part of the consensus decision-making process. If you still can't come to an agreement, go back to step 3 and reformulate your proposals, and continue from there.

- 7. If there is no major objection, clearly state the decision and test
- for consensus. If somebody offers no objections, don't assume
- that they agree. In order to reach consensus, each person must
- state that they are willing to support and implement the decision.
- If one person can't honestly say this, return to the discussion!

Obviously there are some problems with this method, not least of which is how time-consuming it can be. However, it does offer some great benefits. Consensus decision-making can be the most satisfying way for a group to make big, broad decisions. Consensus decision-making is a cooperative effort, and it creates a feeling of ownership over the final decision. The process itself can also be a good opportunity for the group to strengthen its understanding of relevant issues.

Consensus is reached when everybody can honestly say that they are willing to support and implement the decision. However, the final decision is not likely to be any person's first choice. It is a "hammered-out" decision, made up of the most useful suggestions from each person in the group; given the range of options, the time that is available, the funds, and the skills and experience of the group, the decision is the best one that can be reached.

Vetoing

Any person has the right to veto a decision and block consensus. However, there are some fundamental problems with the veto. In theory, the veto can be used by anybody — in practice, however, it is almost always used by the people with the most seniority, popularity, or confidence within the group. This undermines the goal of having an equal dialogue with all, and can have the opposite effect and actually give more power to already powerful individuals.

The only way to avoid these problems is to make sure that everybody feels comfortable with each other and knowledgeable about the issue and the decision-making process. Consensus decision-making works best in groups that have been established for a while, where the members know each other and do not feel intimidated by the seniority of the leaders. If the members of your

group all know each other well, and everyone understands how the veto can be used and misused, you should be able to avoid these problems.

Making Consensus Work

Achieving real consensus, not just an illusion of consensus, can be a lot harder than it seems. It requires all group members to take responsibility for their opinions, and define for themselves exactly what they do and do not want. It means finding ways to ensure that everybody does, in reality, participate in the decision; some people feel uncomfortable in groups and are tempted to keep quiet during the decision-making process, especially if they feel that their opinions are going to annoy the rest of the group. This means that the full range of individual ideas and experience (which consensus decision-making claims to capitalize on) is often not exposed!



Above all, make the decision-making process fit your needs. Don't hang on to somebody else's model if it's repeatedly causing problems for your group. There are already many ways to practice consensus decision-making, and there's no reason you can't develop a model of your own. Some groups allow members to veto a veto — others are willing to fall back on a democratic vote if, after several attempts, they fail to reach consensus.

One important point to remember is that a consensus decision doesn't have to involve every person every step of the way. One way to really streamline things is to delegate the proposal development to a few members who really have the time to think about the issue. In small groups of two or three, these members take ideas from group brainstorms and discussions and formulate proposals, which they then bring back to the whole group. This will speed up the process immensely, and might result in proposals that are much more coherent and well thought-out.

Ongoing Evaluation

Sometimes you can't just wait for people to identify problems out of thin air. You have to sniff around a bit. You can do that by asking each person for some thoughts on how they're doing in the middle of a meeting. You can have spoken and/or written evaluations after a meeting, event, or campaign.

• Here are some questions to think about:

- Is the group achieving its goals?
- How are group dynamics?
- Are your meetings productive?
- Is enthusiasm high or waning?
- Are you learning and gaining valuable experience in this work?

Ongoing evaluation doesn't just help your group function better. When people voice their concerns and suggestions, it gives them a feeling of ownership in the process, so they will be more likely to stick around.

Planning for Turnover

In a youth organization, planning for turnover is a big deal. People will likely be members of your group for only a year or two, and four years at the most. Training new leaders and making sure that there is some continuity takes a bit of effort.

Having a faculty advisor or teacher who attends your meetings can be useful. A faculty member will probably stay at the school a lot longer than any students. Being part of the SYC national network, and any other regional networks will also help with continuity. Make sure that at the end of each school year, you send SYC the names of two leaders who will be returning the following September.

Having a real office is also a big help. An office gives you a physical presence; so even when individual members move on, people won't forget that your group exists. The office can be any size, even a section of a larger room - the important thing is to have the physical space, and a place to leave all your information and resources that is accessible to potential members.

Schedule regular training sessions. Mentor younger activists, and encourage younger youth to go to conferences, training sessions,

networking, and take leadership roles. Make sure that you have at least two leaders behind you to take over next year. They should know who they are months before the end of the year.

Documentation

Document everything your group does, especially all of your achievements. It's great to have an overview to hand out to new members and familiarize them with your group's history. If you can prepare a CD-Rom with articles about your group's activities, letters to the editor that your group has written, photos or videos of your events, it will help greatly to integrate new members into your group's current situation.



The most important point is to collect and record every piece of printed material released by or written about your group, all of your photos and videos, your meeting minutes, etc. You could also record interviews with some of your most active members before they leave the group — anything that will be helpful or inspiring for future members. Make sure that everything is dated and arranged in chronological order. Organize this archive in a 3-ring binder, or, preferably, save digital copies and then burn your entire archive onto CDs at various intervals. If you keep this archive up, it will be an invaluable resource as your group membership shifts. If you keep up a good archive, a condensed version can also be a valuable resource to give to potential funders.



CREATING A CAMPAIGN

Now that you've got a committed group, you can start developing a project to work on. This, of course, was the whole point of forming the group in the first place.

This section describes the issues you'll need to consider when deciding exactly how to structure your campaign. Careful, detailed planning at the beginning of the project is crucial — too many groups end up halfway through something and realize the whole idea was unwise to begin with.

Holding a Planning Retreat

To develop the most effective, coherent campaign plan possible, you'll need to hold a special planning meeting. Secure a comfortable meeting location and plenty of refreshments. Make a special effort to pick a time when your whole group can attend — no one who will be involved in the campaign should miss out on its organization. However, also encourage everyone who comes to be sufficiently prepared.

At the planning meeting, go through each of the subjects described in this section of the guide. Make sure there is a whiteboard or an easel and butcher paper for recording thoughts and developing your strategy. Just as during a regular meeting, you'll

need a designated facilitator to keep the planning process on track. At the end of the session, you should have a complete campaign strategy chart, containing all of the following components:

- **1. Campaign Basics**
- 1a. Campaign Focus
- 1b. Environmental Goals
- 1c. Organizational Goals
- 1d. Campaign Targets
- **2. Capacity Considerations**
- 2a. Strengths and Weaknesses
- 2b. Allies and Opponents
- **3. Implementation Strategy**
- 3a. Tactics and Actions
- 3b. Publicity and the Media
- 3c. Budgets and Fundraising
- 3d. Campaign Timeline
- **4. Measuring Success**

Each of these components is discussed in detail in the following pages. Even though each item is numbered, you'll probably end up moving back and forth and developing ideas for several sections all at once. (While identifying your group's strengths and weaknesses, for example, you'll likely come up with more ideas for your organizational goals.) Think of the campaign strategy as a web or network of components, not a simple list. Work through the entire outline at least once, but be open to revisiting any section at any time.

Campaign Basics

Campaign Focus

Define your campaign's focus by identifying a problem you wish to address — lack of environmental education at your school, pesticides on school grounds, lack of pedestrian streets near campus, lack of locally grown produce in school cafeterias, etc.

If you have background material in the form of magazine or newspaper articles or studies that support your position, all the

better. If you don't have these materials initially, start collecting information that supports your vision of how things should be changed. This material can be valuable for showing others that your group is working on a serious issue.

Environmental goals

This is how your efforts will actually affect the environment. Try to be concrete and specific. Make your final goal quantifiable. When it is reached, you will know it, and you'll be able to celebrate victory.

If you are embarking on a very ambitious project, make sure that you set intermediate goals at each step of the project, so you have a way to measure your progress, and a chance to celebrate small victories. Without these smaller interim goals, your group will lose steam.



Organizational Goals

This is how your efforts will strengthen your group. This aspect is often neglected, but in the long run, organizational goals are just as important as the environmental component of your campaign. If your group comes out of each campaign stronger than it went in, you will be able to tackle ever greater issues in each of your future campaigns.

- A checklist of organizational goals for an entire campaign might
- look like this:
-
- **1. Recruit at least five new volunteers/members**
-
- **2. Teach two members to use software to design brochures, a skill they will bring to future campaigns**
-
- **3. Develop two new leaders within the group, who can take on greater responsibilities in future campaigns**
-
- **4. Create two new contacts with newspaper/magazine/tv reporters who know you by name**
-
- **5. Raise \$200 for the group to put towards equipment, a resource library, honorariums for volunteers, etc.**
-

Targets

Think about who has the power to give you what you want. Depending on your focus and goals, there will likely be a key

decision-maker who is in a position to change a policy, support a project, or otherwise make the decision that will meet your environmental goals. There will also be secondary targets - people who have greater influence on the decisions made by your primary target. Remember that targets are always individual people with names and addresses, not entire companies or government ministries. Identify your target and your secondary targets, and focus your energy on influencing the decisions that they make.

Capacity Considerations

Capacity considerations are factors, both good and bad, that you'll have to keep in mind when developing your campaign. Constraints due to your group's inexperience in certain areas, or your school administrator's close friendship with the CEO of a chemical corporation, must be taken into consideration. It is equally important to identify factors you have in your advantage (special skills, alliances with another community group, etc.) so you can capitalize on them.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Even before developing your organizational goals, map out your group's strengths and weaknesses. How many experienced leaders do you have? How many reliable members? How much money? How much experience with the media? What types of technical skills? What types of artistic skills? Organize your campaign to maximize the benefits from what your group does best. Focus your organizational goals on your weakest areas, or on areas where you would like to improve the most.

Allies and Opponents

Are there any other individuals or groups who care about the issue enough to help with your campaign (community environmental groups, etc...)? Are there others you can convince to help your campaign, especially financially (student governments, etc...)? Are there any people who stand to lose something if your campaign succeeds? How do their strengths and weaknesses compare to yours?

Implementation Strategy

Once you've identified exactly what you want to accomplish, and the framework within which you'll have to work, your implementation strategy is the next (and most important) section to develop.

Tactics and Actions

Try to choreograph your campaign so that one activity follows logically from the next. You might begin with a public announcement of your project and its environmental goals, and host a kick-off party to formally initiate your group's involvement with the issue. Follow up with a series of actions and tactics that contribute to your environmental and organizational goals. Use escalating tactics — start small and get bigger. Make sure that you plan a good mix of activities, which will contribute to your goals, involve new people in the issue, raise funds, and attract media attention. Sometimes one event can do all of these things at once.



Some common grassroots actions and tactics include public demonstrations, workshops, boycotts, political lobbying, petitions, newsletters, letters to the editor, etc. On its own, each individual tactic might not be that effective. Combined into a coherent campaign strategy, however, they can have a lot more impact, especially when carried out creatively.

- Match your tactics to your project and to your capacity — there is no one type of tactic that will work in every situation.
- Be as creative as possible — try to catch the attention of your campaign targets, the media, and the public with something they've never quite seen before.
- Be sure to focus every tactic on the primary or secondary targets of your campaign, and make sure that each tactic is making a specific demand.

Actions An action is an event or activity, designed to confront, inform, and pressure key decision-makers (the target or secondary targets of your campaign). Actions also attract the media and raise public consciousness about the issue you are focusing on.

Actions are not limited to big, noisy demonstrations. Smaller, quieter events can be just as effective, if they are well planned and

especially if they are very creative. By now, it's safe to say that public protests have lost their novelty. People are used to hearing about large demonstrations and rallies, and neither the general public nor the decision-makers seem to be paying much attention. You'll probably be much more successful if you organize a relaxed, creative event where you welcome the public to help pressure the decision-makers.

- Here are some general guidelines for actions:
- **Focus the Action:** Try to make the place, action, props, words, and promotional materials all work naturally together. For example, if you want more bike lanes, don't show up to the event in a car. **Time the Action Right:** What stage are you at in your campaign? How much does the community know about the issue? Will people show up?
- **Plan the Event:** Decide what you want to achieve, how long the event will last, and how you'll fill the time allotted. Know where the participants stand on the event and that everyone is there for the same event.
- **Network:** Especially if you are inexperienced. There are always activists whose wisdom can help you organize direct action effectively.
- **Promote the Event to the Media:** Create a good "media image" using such materials as banners, costumes, or visuals. Make sure that your spokespersons are obvious and available for comments.

Publicity and the Media

Some groups are so busy working on projects that they have no time or energy left to develop relations with the media. Without media coverage, however, their work loses much of its value. Media coverage can be incredibly powerful. It can also completely misrepresent what your group is doing. Not only do you have to make sure you get the coverage, you have to make sure it's the kind of coverage that will help your project.

It's important to include media work in your project timeline right from the beginning, so you can time press releases and media events for when they'll be most beneficial. Sometimes you'll want a lot of

media coverage at the beginning of your campaign, simply to garner support. To attract the media, you'll need to hold a series of publicity events (press conferences, releases of reports, photo stunts, etc...)

Your ability to attract the media will depend on how much experience your group has had, and how willing your members are to speak publicly and interact with reporters and journalists.

Within your group, spend some time discussing how you want to use the media, and what level of media you will approach. Even if you're "only" aiming to change policies at your own school, it's important that the wider community knows what you're doing. Media coverage will bring in invaluable community support, and if the next project your group takes on is at the community level, your group will already have some recognition.

A Media Strategy So how do you go about actually attracting the media to your project? Here are some points to keep in mind when deciding where the media fit into your campaign.

- **Plan to attract the media.** The media covers actions and events, not organizational meetings or planning sessions. The more imaginative your actions are, and the more people they involve, the better your chances of coverage. Local media covers news within your community - and news is any person or event that merits special attention. Make sure that you have events scheduled throughout your campaign that are at least potentially newsworthy.
- **Remember your audience.** Keep in mind who will be reading, watching, or listening to the media coverage of your campaign. Will your message be reaching the general public? People who are already supporters of your group? The decision-makers who have the power to give you what you want? If your interview is with a school newspaper, the audience is going to be quite different than if you're interviewed by a community paper. Keep in mind who will be hearing your message, and tailor it accordingly.
- **Keep yourselves in the news.** No matter how long your project lasts, make sure that you have enough short-term success to stay in the news regularly. One isolated news story probably won't do a lot for your group in the long run. Plan to meet a short-term goal

- at least once a month so you can report on your success, or plan
- an activity that will attract the media’s attention. In addition to
- keeping you in the public’s consciousness, this will keep group
- members excited about a long-running campaign.

Spokespersons

Make sure that you have designated spokespersons, and make sure that they are all telling the same story. It’s vital that these people are actually doing real work within your group, and have not simply volunteered to be spokespersons in order to see themselves on local TV. It’s great if they’re also articulate and charismatic, but the best you can do is to make sure they know what they’re talking about.



If your spokespersons are nervous before an event, run through a practice session. Have other people in the group pretend to be reporters. Your spokespersons can practice answering predictable questions and developing short statements that can be taken as sound bites. At the real event, your spokespersons should try to stick to this prepared script. If they don’t know the answer to a reporter’s question, your spokespersons should say “I don’t know.” It’s much more damaging to say “no comment” (which can be misconstrued) or to give your best guess.

Media Lists

Establish a media list of reporters, journalists, editors, and program managers who are most likely to cover your group’s activities. As you actually make contact with these people, your list will change as some promising reporters.

Begin by contacting similar organizations in your community to see if they’ll share their media lists. If not, get out the local Yellow Pages and look at listings for “Newspapers,” “News Services,” “Radio Stations” etc. Finally, the public library might have a local media directory in the reference section.

Media Events

Like every other part of your project, your media events should be designed to advance both your environmental goals and your organizational goals. Your spokespersons should mention the name of your group in press releases and interviews (“As members of (group), we feel that...”) Not only will this make your project sound more impressive (as if it could be backed by hundreds of people in

your organization), it will also get your name out to your community, building support and potential connections. When speaking with print media, specifically ask for your group's name and email address to be printed at the bottom of the story. If there are TV reporters or newspaper photographers present at your event, make sure that you've got banners and signs and buttons and stickers with your group's name and the message for your project. Position them so that however the cameras turn, your name will be in the picture.

Finally... Even if you do everything right, the media coverage might not be to your liking. Use it as an opportunity to get more coverage. If you were misrepresented, call the newspaper or TV reporters. Write a letter to the editor to clarify your position.

Budgets and Fundraising

No matter how small your group, or how simple your project, you'll want to go about things in a creative, ambitious way. That means you'll need some money.

Outline a rough budget, and organize a fundraising plan right at the beginning of your project. Schedule fundraising events into your timeline. Try to integrate things: in some cases, you'll find that a fundraising event can be combined with a media event, and can also be used to sign up more volunteers at the same time.

Having a budget will actually help you raise money, since funders like to know their money is being spent rationally. Your budget should include the value of every single expense you can think of, even if it won't cost you anything (e.g. if your office space is donated or if someone lends you a computer, write in the estimated value of this service). This will help you convince potential funding sources that you are responsible and have already covered a lot of your expenses.



Writing a Budget Writing out a budget is easy — it's basically just a list — but it can take some time. It really helps if you can enter the information into a spreadsheet program, so you'll be able to make changes much more easily.

- **1. Look through your timeline of events** and activities and
- review your campaign plan. Try to lay out each and every thing
- you will need — right down to coloured markers for decorating
- your posters. Make a list, and include as many details as you
- possibly can. Remember to include things like office space,
- refreshments, phone and Internet bills, and copying, in addition
- to materials.
- **2. Estimate the cost of every item** on your list. Make some phone
- calls to find out the cost of anything you're unsure about - if you
- get too many ballpark figures, your budget could be off by an
- order of magnitude. Add everything up - this is your total
- projected expenditure.
- **3. Go through your list again**, and put brackets around
- everything that your group will get for free (if volunteers will
- bring refreshments for all your meetings, snacks won't cost
- anything after all). Include all the materials and services that you
- should be able to get donated from the community. Add up the
- total cost of these items to get the value of your projected in-kind
- donations.
- **4. After subtracting the value of your in-kind donations** from
- your total projected expenditure, you'll see the amount of cash
- that you'll actually need to raise. Of course, if some of your in-
- kind donations fall through, you'll need cash to cover some of
- those expenses as well. Make sure you factor this scenario into
- your fundraising plans.

As you develop the budget, ask yourself if each expenditure is really necessary. Which specific organizational or environmental goal will it contribute to? If you can't answer this question, consider removing the item.

Now that you can see what you'll need, you'll need to find the funds.

Fundraising There are numerous sources you can go to for support. Individuals, other organizations, and local businesses are all potential funders. You'll hear "no" many times, but you'll probably be surprised by how willing people are to contribute — as long as your campaign doesn't threaten to put them out of business or re-zone their neighbourhood.

Who and how: Figure out who to ask for what, and how to approach each donor.
fundraising strategies. Think about who has money to spare and who has a vested interest in your campaign. Make lists of potential donors, and divide the lists up between group members for follow-up — make sure that the same donor isn't asked to contribute twice!



Fundraising activities can fall under several broad categories: events (hosting movie nights, bake sales, coffee houses, public speakers, dinners); soliciting contributions (from members, other individuals, local businesses); sales (selling organic cotton t-shirts, local produce, fair trade chocolate or coffee, tree-free paper, even raffle tickets); and in-kind donations of products or services.

Select a good variety of activities for your fundraising strategy, and place them strategically throughout your project timeline so you'll always have funds when you need them. Estimate how much you'll be able to raise from each activity. Something will inevitably go wrong, so aim to raise more funds than you'll actually need. Try to plan a range of activities that will reach out to the broadest possible range of people.

Events Fundraising events often cost money to run, and take a lot of time to organize, so make sure you'll be getting enough in return! Make money, save time. It can take the same amount of work to plan an event for 50 people as 500 people. Be ambitious and promote your fundraising activities. If you're hosting events where only friends show up, you need to do more outreach. Collaborate with other local groups and attract their membership bases. Many communities have restaurants or pubs that you can book for a night and take home a portion of the cover charge. Get some local bands to come in and play. Not only will you attract people interested in your cause, but you'll also reach out to regulars at the restaurant, and fans of the musicians.

Soliciting contributions. Many individuals support what your group is working towards, but they don't have time to come to meetings or participate in your work. These people are usually quite willing to contribute financially instead — the better your media coverage is, the more people will know of your work and be in this position. It's best to go door-to-door when looking for contributions. If you're asking for a

significant contribution, always approach the donor in person rather than over the phone. Always ask for a specific amount of money, and aim high (flatter people with your overestimation of their financial resources!) A lot of people feel uncomfortable asking for money, but remember how important your campaign is. Relate this importance when you approach potential donors. Make sure they know what a difference their contribution will make to your efforts.

Another option is to collect membership dues from your group. It might seem unfair — charging the very people who are committing the most time to your activities! However, most people don't mind paying modest membership fees, and it can actually help keep your group together — consciously or not, people feel like they've got more of a stake in something if they've committed to it financially.

Selling things This can be tricky (most of us aren't too excited about promoting consumerism) but there are ways to go about it responsibly. If you choose to raise funds by selling things, try to choose products that are a healthier alternative to what people would otherwise buy in a store. If you can sell 100 people organic cotton t-shirts, you'll keep them from buying regular t-shirt at a department store. Collaborate with local artisans or farmers to sell their goods as a fundraiser — this can actually be a great way to build connections within your community. Selling raffle tickets for a variety of locally produced items can be especially successful — if you can get the prizes donated, it's hard not to make money on a raffle!

Remember that door-to-door sales is one of the riskiest ways to make money, and you probably won't raise as much as you expect, unless you can get your sales items donated. Don't be fooled by other groups that seem to make big money by selling small things — groups that sell candy door-to-door, for example, usually have massive armies of children doing the sales, whose parents and grandparents buy most of the products.

In-kind donations To help facilitate in-kind donations, develop a wish list for your group. Take this list to people and businesses who might be able to provide these items. Always offer the option of contributing either cash or an item on the wish list. With any fundraising activity you undertake, set a goal for the amount you want to raise, then figure out ways to reach that goal.

Finally, never forget to thank donors (and send thank-you letters to people who've contributed large amounts), especially if you want them to contribute again!

Campaign Timeline There are two crucial points on drawing up a timeline. The first is that your timeline be complete — if you do everything on it when you schedule it, you'll have a good chance of success. The second is that you attach names to tasks that have to be done, so you know who to ask for an update and so you can make sure everything gets done. Your timeline should include every event you plan to host, every short-term goal you hope to reach, every door-to-door fundraising day you'll need to hold, and so on.

Drawing up a timeline gives you a clear overview of how your project will unfold. If it's hard to know where to start, try working backwards from your final goals. If you want to achieve your major environmental goal by the end of the school year, write that on the timeline first, and then figure out how soon you'll need to start everything else in order to meet that goal by that time.

By the end of your planning retreat, your timeline should include tentative dates for every component of the campaign that you have discussed.

Measuring Success

Make sure that everyone is familiar with your timeline and believes that it's realistic. Post a big copy on the wall of your office, and give each member a copy to keep, so everyone knows exactly what they're supposed to be doing for the campaign at any time.

Make sure that your group's activities are designed so that you have a clear way to measure your success. Some groups spend months on a project, but at the end it is not clear exactly what has been accomplished. A lot of energy can be wasted on tactics that aren't very effective, unless there is a way to measure just how effective they are. Always make sure that you will be able to measure how much of an impact you've had, both at the end of the project and at strategic times during the campaign. For any particular activity that you use to reach your goals, also make sure that you will be able to determine the activity's success. This will help you determine what to repeat, and when to celebrate.



SOLUTION AND PROJECT IDEAS

This section of the Group Kit describes SYC’s set of interrelated “solutions,” four themes which will be promoted through all national projects. These solutions can also be promoted through a variety of local projects run by groups. Our efforts are focused on solutions at the regional, community, institutional, and individual level; SYC supports the complementary themes of bioregionalism, sustainable communities, education for sustainability, and voluntary simplicity. The result is a vision for a multi-layered strategy. We address these issues in our projects, we make links with others working on these issues, and we create tools related to these issues to support the efforts of local groups.

SYC’s Solutions

Regional Level: Bioregionalism

Local Level: Sustainable Communities

Institutional Level: Education for Sustainability

Individual Level: Lifestyle Simplicity

SYC coordinates ongoing initiatives, such as the Sustainable Campuses Project addressing education for sustainability, which local groups can learn from and build on. SYC is also here to support projects developed by local groups. If your group has an amazing

idea, SYC just might help you take it a lot further. The Climate Change Caravan in the summer of 2001 was an example of this sort of local initiative — a group of students approached SYC with the idea of cycling across the country to raise awareness about climate change. The national office took on much of the coordination of that project and helped it become a reality. Now SYC hopes to help produce a video of the C3 journey and focus on helping students reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



SYC is committed to moving away from responsive activism, and becoming constructive and solutions-based. If we are constantly fighting against things, there will never be a visible legacy of our work. In addition to preventing environmental degradation, we need to promote visible alternatives. Instead of just cleaning up after others, we need to go out and create new spaces. Reactive environmentalism still encompasses extremely important work, but pro-active work is equally important, and too often forgotten.

SYC's set of solutions addresses the ways that people think about their place in the environment, which gets to the root causes of many environmental problems. The following pages describe each of our four solutions, describe initiatives being taken by the national office, and suggest ideas for local projects. If you are interested in more information about any of SYC's activities, do not hesitate to give us a call!

Bioregionalism

A bioregion is a geographic area encompassing a unique pattern of vegetation, animal life, climate, soil types, water, landforms, and human cultures. A bioregion can be any size. Its borders are loosely defined by a combination of ecology, anthropology, and geography — not politics.

Bioregionalism is a way of living and thinking about the role of humans in the natural world. Imagine if everyone thought consciously about the physical landscape and the ecosystems surrounding them.

Imagine if everyone considered the other species of animals and plants that share the same space, and the human cultures that have historically lived in the region. Essentially, these are the most basic

“It’s as if mainline environmental movements are running a hospital with only an emergency ward.”

— David McCloskey, founder of the Cascadia Institute

facts of inhabiting any place on Earth — yet many people in our culture seem to ignore them.

Bioregionalism is an inherently pro-active form of environmentalism. It is not content with simple conservation, or “Saving what’s left.” By calling attention to the connections within a region, bioregionalists show how important it is to maintain the vitality of everything in that region — not just bits and pieces that are set aside as “protected areas.”

SYC’s Regional Emphasis

As a national organization, SYC can do much to educate people about bioregionalism. But these ideas can only be implemented by people who inhabit each region. We are trying to facilitate this change by increasing the regional emphasis within our organization: SYC hopes to soon employ regional coordinators and offer regional conferences.

SYC tries to incorporate bioregionalism — not just environmentalism — into everything we do. We always attempt to be pro-active rather than reactionary. Through all our projects, we encourage people to think about their place in the natural world. Our primary focus is always on people and their relationships with each other and with the environment.

Whenever possible, we respect bioregional principals in concrete ways, even though national programs extend across all the bioregions of Canada. For example, for each of our national conferences, we hire local students, and we serve food that has been grown in the region of the conference. Soon our regional gatherings, in addition to the highly successful national conferences, will give youth from associated bioregions an opportunity to come together.

Working In Your Region

Before starting to work on bioregional issues within your group, take the time to identify and begin to understand your own bioregion. It’s amazing what we don’t know and take for granted about the places where we spend our lives. Introducing the topic of bioregionalism to your group can be an interesting activity in itself, and it can very easily lead to some intriguing ideas.

*Know Where You Are:
A Bioregional Quiz*

Bring this quiz to your group's meeting and pass it around. People will probably be interested to find out how much they don't know...

1. Trace the water you drink from the point of precipitation to the tap. What sort of treatment does it undergo? Trace the water that drains from your sink on its path to the ocean. What sort of treatment does it undergo this time?
2. Name the wildflower that is the first to bloom each spring.
3. What is the average yearly precipitation in your area? Which month gets the least? Which month is the most variable?
4. Name five edible wild plants in your area and the season that they ripen.
5. How long is the growing season in your area?
6. Name four tree or shrub species that grew wild in your area 200 years ago. How many of them are locally extinct? Name four other species that grow wild in your area now. How many of them are native?
7. From your current position, point north. Point towards the nearest vending machine.
8. Name five languages commonly spoken in your area, other than English. (BONUS point for each language in which you can count to 10.)
9. Name ten species of birds that are common in your area. How many of them are native? Which ones migrate, and which ones stay all year?
10. Name five sounds that you hear outdoors on a daily basis. How many of those sounds would you have heard in this area 50 years ago? 100 years ago? (BONUS point for imitating each sound.)
11. What is the average maximum temperature for each month of the year?
12. How many days last year were smog warnings issued for your area? How does this compare to five years ago?
13. What's the hardest part of your city to reach by public transit from your residence? How many buses do you have to take to get there?

- 14. What was the name given to your area by the local aboriginal culture? What did the name mean?
-
- 15. What major interest groups influence your city's politicians?
-

Hint: Go outside, walk around, look at things!

Bioregional Ideas...

Here are some creative and informative bioregional activities that your group can use to keep everyone inspired and happy. If you're in the midst of a big campaign, try to schedule some time for enjoyable activities...

- • **Make a bioregional calendar.** Give each of the twelve months (or each of the thirteen moons) a bioregionally-appropriate name. Specify the times when native flowers bloom and when the edible plants are available. Include the times of greatest and lowest average precipitation, and average normal temperatures. Indicate the times when native birds migrate and when municipal government decisions will be made that will affect your community. Mark local historical events such as droughts, floods, high pollution levels. Consider finishing your calendar with original photographs or drawings. (And consider distributing it as a fundraiser!)
- • **Make a bioregional map.** Most conventional maps are entirely inappropriate for representing the connections within a bioregion: topography isn't visible on a street map, vegetation isn't visible on a topographical map, and in almost all cases, maps end abruptly at political borders rather than any natural boundary. Try not to think of everything from a human perspective. Include land features that might be hidden, such as the former stream beds of creeks that have been paved over or diverted.
- • **Investigate the place-names** given to your region by other cultures. Very likely, familiar place-names reflect the names of European colonizers or military leaders, not the nature of the place itself. Pre-colonial names for regions and landscape features are often much more focused on characteristics of your bioregion. If your area retains many pre-colonial names, find out what they mean.

- **Change your address** to reflect the place where you really live. Give directions that make use of ecological landmarks and historical place names. Start by locating yourself within a watershed, then gradually clarify the exact location of your home using a series of local landmarks. Give details about each aspect of the place — if you live on the southern slope of No-Name Peak, tell us how high it is and its average snowpack.
- And of course, it's always appropriate to **host a bioregional party** to celebrate a distinctive feature of your bioregion. A first-snowfall party, a beginning-of-the-rainy season party, or a party to celebrate the return of the migratory birds. Bring people together to honour the place where you live.

Sustainable Communities

Imagine if every community enhanced the vitality of its bioregion. Every layer in SYC's set of solutions is connected, and it's actually at the community level that many of the changes need to occur. Bioregionalism is threatened by economic globalization and a lack of local connections; enhancing networks within your community, and increasing the level of self-sufficiency, is a crucial step in reversing this trend.

SYC trains and provides guidance and resources for youth across Canada who are trying to make their local communities more sustainable.

Creating a Sustainable Community: Ideas

How would you change the community where you live? Municipal land use, zoning, and building methods, transportation, local economic patterns, food sources, and municipal energy, water, and pesticide use can all contribute to or detract from the vitality of your bioregion. Environmental groups can have a big effect on policy at the community level. For example, a successful campaign for a pesticide by-law in Halifax was spearheaded by community groups. Lawn and garden pesticide use is now being phased out, and will soon be completely eliminated from the Halifax municipality.

Transportation is often one of the biggest issues relating to community sustainability. This is also an issue that is universally

important to students commuting between home, school, and work. SYC groups at several universities are working to introduce a Universal Bus Pass (U-Pass) for students at their schools. At the University of Victoria, this program has been operating successfully for several years. The U-Pass is funded through student fees - everyone pays a little extra each year (a fraction of the cost of a bus pass), and in return every student gets free access to public transportation! Not only does this make things more economical for those who ride the bus regularly, it encourages people with cars to use public transit instead of driving.



Another significant issue is where a community's food comes from. Food in North America travels an average of 1,300 miles from the farm to the supermarket shelf, and up to 40% of food that is shipped into large cities is lost due to spoilage before it even reaches the consumer! It's often possible to grow the same crops much closer to the city, but subsidies and patterns of trade mean that food is shipped in from great distances. There are two major ways to reverse this trend: urban gardening, and support for local farmers. Urban gardening, on rooftops or in community parks, is an immensely exciting possibility: not only does it allow urban residents to produce their own food, but it provides habitat, shade, storm-water retention, and beauty within even the densest parts of cities. In many areas, it's also possible to buy into a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. These are direct partnerships between community members and local farmers. Individuals purchase a share of the season's harvest, and the farmers provide weekly deliveries of fresh produce. The members are assured of high quality, local produce throughout the growing season, and the farmers are assured of a sufficient market for their crops.

Communities that minimize harm to surrounding ecosystems are vital, but how about communities designed to actively encourage people to think about the natural world? Some of the most exciting campaigns are those that change people's perceptions through visible improvements to the urban environment. Campaigns for pedestrian (car-free) streets, urban habitat revitalization, rooftop gardens, and similar ambitious and concrete initiatives are extremely powerful. These are pro-active projects that create a whole new space for people to enjoy a few aspects of the natural world — trees,

bird songs, fresh local veggies. This is one of the best ways to reach out to people who never considered themselves environmentalists. Even people who never supported the campaign will come out and enjoy the peace, friendliness, and beauty of a car-free street. When the next local environmental issue arises, they might get involved. Also think about the effect your community has on areas further a field. Even if your community is very well linked within your bioregion, there will always be some products and ideas that are imported or exported. This trade has effects on both bioregions involved, at both the importing and exporting end. A community can't be sustainable if it's harming any bioregion — its own or another community's. Promoting fair trade products is a start.

SYC Best Practices Database In 2002 SYC partnered with the United Nations Association of Canada (UNAC) to create MOSAIC, an on-line searchable database of sustainability success stories of Canada's youth. Mosaic is a bridge between those who are taking concrete action towards sustainable development and those who want to learn how they can be more active. You can search for youth projects by theme, province or keywords! Check it out for some cool ideas at www.unac.org/mosaic or submit your own projects for others to learn from!

Purchasing Co-ops As a group, you have considerable purchasing power — why not make use of this power to support businesses within your region and community? In some cases, your group will be able to buy from distributors and farmers who don't have the capacity sell to individuals. Many groups are taking advantage of this situation and ordering bulk deliveries of natural and organic products, which are often quite expensive in retail stores. Food, fabrics, and paper are three cases where purchasing co-ops can be very successful. The purchasing co-op allows each person to save money, while at the same time increasing demand for alternative products.

A group of 10 to 20 members is ideal for forming a purchasing co-op. You'll need to designate someone to be the coordinator, to oversee the co-op and make sure things run efficiently; a treasurer, to deposit everyone's money on time to ensure that a good cheque can be written for the supplier; two or three people to compile your orders on a computer; and as many sorters as possible, to sort

your bulk order into individual boxes. Additionally, you'll also need a location (someone's house) where your bulk order can be delivered.

Depending on the type of product you're ordering, you can place an order every few weeks, every few months, twice a year, whatever.

These sorts of mass actions are extremely important to help green businesses provide less expensive alternatives.

Education For Sustainability

People continue to engage in environmentally damaging activities due to a complete inability to even perceive the problem — a lack, or failure, of education. Educational institutions play a large part in shaping the thoughts and values of future leaders in government, business, and education itself. People are influenced both by what they hear in classrooms, and by what they see happening around them. Thus, this solution contains two equally important components: education about sustainability, and sustainable practices within the educational system.

Over the past few years, SYC has concentrated on this education for sustainability. We promote sustainability within the curriculum and within the daily functions of universities and high schools.

“Schools, colleges and universities are beginning to respond to the environmental challenges, more often than not because of student interests and pressures. As a result, many institutions have begun to recycle solid wastes. Some are using recycled paper. A few are vigorously pursuing energy efficiency throughout campus operations. But we have a long way to go towards reducing the environmental impacts of educational institutions to acceptable levels, and towards integrating environmental change into a transformed curriculum.” — David Orr, *Campus Ecology*, Foreword, 1993

The Sustainable Campuses Project

The Sustainable Campuses Project is one of SYC's longest-running initiatives. The project aims to inspire, inform, train, and support Canadian students promoting environmental responsibility and sustainability in post-secondary institutions. The Project's Sustainable



Campuses Conference has evolved into a highly successful annual event, held at a different Canadian university each year.

Youth Action Gatherings

A new program of SYC, Youth Action Gatherings exist to activate, empower and educate a broad diversity of high school aged youth in Canada on issues of social and environmental sustainability. A major event of the program is an annual week-long gathering that is organized and held by youth to provide the skills, knowledge and experiences needed for young people to take action in their own communities. Most importantly, SYC provides support mechanisms for youth after the gathering to engage in their own self-determined project in their own community.



Greening the Ivory Towers: Academia to Action!

An initiative of the Sustainable Campuses Project, Greening the Ivory Towers is based on a tool that was developed to measure sustainability on Canadian Campuses. This tool, called the Campus Sustainability Assessment Framework is based on 2 systems: Ecosystems and Human Systems. These systems are broken down to a series of sustainability indicators that students can use to measure their university's progress towards environmental and social well-being. SYC has produced the Greening the Ivory Towers Tool-kit which is a cd-rom that includes this research framework, a how-to guide in doing a sustainability assessment and a series of resources for making recommendations. The long-term goal is for SYC to produce a State of Sustainability for Canadian Campuses based on consistent measurements.

Undergraduate Paper Compilations

At every university across the country, students are addressing environmental and sustainability issues in their research papers. Unfortunately, there is no way to access the best of this work. Undergraduate paper compilations, issued once a year or at the end of each term, would be a great way to highlight some of the most

innovative thoughts and ideas. A small paper compilation could be published at each university, or students from schools throughout the country could be invited to submit their most innovative papers for a larger publication.

Audits

Conducting an environmental audit is one of the most direct ways to quantify sustainability at your school. You can audit energy use, waste production, or any other sector. Groups at a growing number of universities across the country have conducted campus audits, and in some cases this has resulted in the school adopting an environmental policy. Some schools now hire students to perform regular audits to make sure the campus is keeping up with its environmental goals.

To help assess your university's current sustainability levels, have a look at the University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF) Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ). This exercise will take 3-4 hours and is meant to be completed by a group of ten to twelve people including students, staff, faculty, and administrators. It is available free online at http://www.ulsf.org/programs_saq.html

K-12 Education

You'll probably find that many local school teachers would be pleased to have members from your group come to give presentations to their classes. Contact some teachers and develop a short program that you can take to a number of schools in your community. Rather than just talking at the kids, try to organize a presentation that actually leads to some action. Be sure to follow up with the classes you present to, and try to establish an ongoing partnership with some of the teachers and students. You could even offer to act as mentors for kids who are particularly interested in greening their school yards or other aspects of sustainability.

Lifestyle Simplicity



Lifestyle simplicity is about living in a way that's completely satisfying, yet gentle enough that everyone could live in a similar way without harming the environment. Usually, this means learning to do more things for yourself, spending less money (or spending money in different places), and thinking about the activities that you put time into, and whether they're activities that you really enjoy and believe in. The irony about lifestyle simplicity is that the more you simplify, the more you end up with — more skills, more knowledge, more connections, more time to do what you love. You will have less of only one thing: stuff. You might already have a pretty simple lifestyle in this respect — students often do, out of necessity, thanks to minimal funds.

On the other hand...

As lifestyle simplicity has become strangely fashionable in recent years, there has certainly been some misunderstanding and corruption of the concept. "Simplicity experts" have emerged who urge people to simplify their lives by buying specialized storage cubes and organizers, by engaging in ridiculously elaborate craft projects to create home-made knickknacks, even replacing good quality furniture with decrepit old tables and chairs bought at exorbitant prices from special antique dealers. People are urged to simplify by buying more. Companies even encourage people to buy less stuff — just as long as it's less stuff from other companies.

From a letter published in the November/December 1997 issue of *Sierra Magazine*:

"I find the spectacle of the environmentally aware middle class attempting '[lifestyle] simplicity' mildly hilarious. Don't get me wrong — I'm all for it. But even with ten-year-old cars, ten-year-old hiking boots, organic-cotton T-shirts, membership in community-sponsored agriculture, and nary a paper towel in the house, our middle-class lives are lavish and opulent... Please, let us all vow to cut down. But let us not be too smug. Even in relatively simplified lifestyles, our material wealth is vast."

Even people with the simplest lifestyles in Canada probably have more of an environmental impact than they'd like. Lifestyle simplicity is not the whole answer to any environmental problem, but it is a small part, and it can be a part that's a lot of fun.

You'll always have to buy some things, and it's inevitable that a few of those products will have to be produced or grown far away. Think about the money it costs to buy these things in terms of the time it took to earn that money: are you willing to trade hundreds or thousands of hours of your life for the money to buy a car... a bicycle... new clothes... food? Are there some purchases you'd rather forgo, and spend those hours doing something you truly enjoy? Some things are worth the time and some things aren't.

Lifestyle Simplicity for Groups?

The trouble with lifestyle simplicity is that it's such an individual choice. It's easy to feel like you're the only one thinking about these things, and the changes you make in your own life are insignificant.

That's why SYC is concerned with encouraging lifestyle simplicity at the group level — if your whole group talks about these issues and makes similar changes, the results become visible and quite inspiring. Even more exciting, advertise what you're doing and start involving people from outside your core group. A lot of you probably practice lifestyle simplicity anyway, so involving others in these activities is especially important.

Have a good time with this. Lifestyle simplicity isn't about depriving yourself or survival skills or even bonding through adversity. Teach yourselves how to silk-screen. Go apple picking. Hold an organic cookie-baking party.

Essentially, this is about having fun in creative ways that fully support your group's mandate.

Components of a Simpler Lifestyle

- **Learning** — take a pottery or weaving class, spend some free time reading at the library, build up your skills, knowledge, and connections. Becoming more competent in more fields increases your ability to enjoy yourself without spending money.
- **Doing things for yourself** — make your own food, clothing, furniture, whatever you enjoy. Fix your own bike. Everything you can do for yourself makes you less dependent on making money, which leaves you with more time to enjoy yourself.
- **Doing things for others** — Trade your skills for someone else's. Fix their bike while they paint a picture or bake some bread or grow some tomatoes for you. Join or organize a community-wide labour-swapping system. This builds connections within your

· community. As more connections develop between individuals,
· there is less reliance on imports and exports, and less exploitation
· of resources and labour from other bioregions.

- • **Doing things that you enjoy** — How much time do you spend
· doing the things that you enjoy the most? Is it more or less time
· than you spend working for money? Are the things you'll be able
· to buy with that money really worth the time that you've
· sacrificed? Of course you'll always need a certain amount of
· money, but know how much is enough. Time is far more valuable.

Becoming an integral part of your community and bioregion —
utilizing local services and resources, rather than those that are
imported, and in turn developing and providing your skills to the local
community, strengthens the connections within your bioregion.

*Simplicity at the
National Office*

We want our organization itself to practice lifestyle simplicity. In five
years, we hope to have a sustainable office in a straw-bale building
that we construct ourselves. It'll be off the grid and surrounded by
an organic farm where staff and interns can grow their own food.
Get in touch with SYC if this sounds interesting! The more
enthusiasm we have, the greater the possibilities...

*Ecological
Footprinting*

Ecological footprinting is a tool to help evaluate your individual
impact on the planet. Ecological footprinting translates everything
you consume into the area of land that is required to provide the
resources and absorb the waste products resulting from that
consumption. The total area is the size of your "footprint." Individual
choices determine the size of a person's footprint, so footprinting is
a valuable tool for determining how sustainable your lifestyle is.
Energy, food, housing, and transportation are among the categories
that are considered in the calculation. The ecological footprint of the
average Canadian equals 4.8 hectares of productive land. If everyone
on earth lived like an average North American, it would require at
least two additional planets to sustain us all! A great resource for
finding out how to calculate your footprint is *Our Ecological
Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*, a book by Mathis
Wackernagel and William Rees.

