

Recommendations for engaging young people with CLIMATE CHANGE campaigns

Insights from new European research

The recommendations in this briefing are aimed at **YOUNG CLIMATE ACTIVISTS** and groups who want to broaden the appeal of their campaigns, and bring in new young audiences. The recommendations are based on the authors'^[1] experiences of working with a global network of over 50 young adult climate campaigners during the last two years, combined with a growing body of social science research on engaging young people on climate change.^[2]

The briefing summarises principles for **effective climate communication**, with the aim of

- ▶ increasing the number of **YOUNG ADULTS** who become actively involved in climate campaigns, and
- ▶ **BROADENING** the appeal of **CLIMATE CAMPAIGNS** beyond people who may already identify themselves as environmentalists.

The research found that by working together young adults can build collective power, work together to create compelling new visions for the future, and thereby give voice to the hopes and aspirations of young adults in the face of a growing climate crisis.

^[1] The cliMATEs_project team was a collaboration between academics, communication specialists, and facilitators from Austria, Germany and the UK. For more details about the project visit <http://climates.boku.ac.at/infos/>

^[2] Corner, A., Roberts, O., Chiari, S., Völler, S., Mayrhuber, E. S., Mandl, S., & Monson, K. (2015). 'How do young people engage with climate change? The role of knowledge, values, message framing, and trusted communicators.' *Wires Climate Change*, Vol. 6(5), pp. 523-534

Do's and don'ts

for maximising the effectiveness of communicating climate campaigns aimed at young people

- ✓ ***Do move beyond activist identities, and position climate campaigning as part of the new normal for young people.*** The campaign identity is crucial to increasing and broadening support - if the campaign's messengers, imagery and language speak to traditional, adult-led campaigns by NGOs the campaign is unlikely to reach the new grassroots of young people's climate campaigning. Taking action on climate change is less about being environmentalist, and more a new social reality.
- ✓ ***Do highlight the moral and justice dimensions of climate change.*** Many of the young campaigners we worked with told us a key motivation for their involvement was concern about the injustice of climate change, with those who were doing least to contribute to climate change being the ones most affected by the impacts.
- ✓ ***Do make use of life stage transitions which offer opportunities to reach new audiences.*** Moments of significant life change (for example moving away from home to start university or a new job) are often a time when young people are shaping their identity as they form new peer groups. These disruptive moments offer unique opportunities for reaching people who might not have otherwise been responsive to campaign messages.

Do's and don'ts for maximising the effectiveness of communicating climate campaigns aimed at young people

✓ ***Do highlight the short term, clear wins for the campaign.***

Young people will be more likely to get involved in campaigns if they offer the potential for making a tangible difference to the environment. Long term political campaigns are likely to be a turn off for many young people, because of the amount of time they will need to invest and/or because of the (perceived) limited chances for success.

- ✓ ***Do harness the collective power of groups to create compelling new stories about the future.*** During the research we brought together twenty young people from across Europe for a four day retreat. During that time the group worked together to co-produce new formats for communicating with young adults, exploring new visions for society. From that process three new campaigns aimed at young adults have been created and will be going live in 2019.



Do's and don'ts for maximising the effectiveness of communicating climate campaigns aimed at young people

- ✓ ***Do recognise the importance of peer support and peer to peer communication.***

Our research found that young climate campaigners often feel isolated and powerless, but when they work together they feel more empowered to effect change.

- ✓ ***Do remember that values and emotions are just as important as facts.***

Numbers and science alone are unlikely to motivate people to become involved. Understand what matters to the campaign's audience and connect your message with those concerns. Tell a story that helps the audience understand the implications of the facts in a way that is relatable and relevant to them.



Do's and don'ts for maximising the effectiveness of communicating climate campaigns aimed at young people

Telling a powerful story

In our research with young adults we saw young people are planning for the near term future. They aspire to establish themselves as independent adults who can flourish and enjoy the pleasures of family, friends and a home. But they see inaction on climate change as threatening to steal that future away from them. Instead of being able to imagine a stable future, young adults instead see the next 10 or 20 years as a time of increasingly precarious living conditions.

Telling the story of how young adults feel their future is being stolen from them as basically unfair, adds a compelling and emotionally resonant moral dimension to the narrative. This worry has also been powerfully communicated by Greta Thunberg (see below) who has motivated many young people to become involved in climate campaigning.



"Many of you appear concerned that we are wasting valuable lesson time, but I assure you we will go back to school the moment you start listening to science and give us a future. Is that really too much to ask? In the year 2030 I will be 26 years old. My little sister Beata will be 23...That is a great age, we have been told. When you have all of your life ahead of you. But I am not so sure it will be that great for us. Now we probably don't even have a future any more. Because that future was sold so that a small number of people could make unimaginable amounts of money."

Greta Thunberg, 2019

Do's and don'ts

for maximising the effectiveness of communicating climate campaigns aimed at young people

▽ ***DON'T assume just because your audience is young they care the way you do.*** There is a growing movement for change amongst young people, but some audiences are more engaged than others. When reaching out to new audiences without a background in activism or direct action consider carefully what type of campaigning strategy and messaging will appeal. Not everyone wants to be involved in direct action or risk arrest, but may still feel they would like to take action on climate change.

▽ ***DON'T rely on technical jargon and numbers to win your audience over.*** Terms such as 'managing climate risks', the '2 degrees limit', and parts per million of carbon dioxide can be unfamiliar and disengaging. Build engagement from the 'values up' rather than downwards from the big numbers of climate change policy discourse.

▽ ***DON'T lead communications with longer term climate impacts, such as sea level rise in 2100.*** For young people, climate change is fundamentally about the 'here and now' – describing the effect it will have on distant generations, as campaigners and scientists often do, undermines the urgency of the problem. ^[4]

▽ ***DON'T launch a communication strategy for your campaign without understanding your audience.*** There is no 'one message fits all' approach. Find out who you want to reach, what issues matter to them, who they would view as a trusted messenger. If possible pilot messages and communication strategies to get feedback on what is and isn't working.

^[4] Corner, A. and Roberts, O. (2015). *How Do 18-25 Year Olds Engage With Climate Change?* Oxford: Climate Outreach

What this briefing is based on

The evidence for the recommendations in this briefing come from a two year European research project that has explored the social factors shaping how and why some young adults become active climate campaigners. The research included reviewing what previous research on this topic had found^[5], interviews and workshops with young adult climate campaign leaders, and a four day residential retreat for twenty young people from across Europe who are concerned about climate change.

The young adults we worked with told us:

- **Social justice** was an important motivation for campaigning.
- Many people reported that the transition into campaigning was often only possible once they left home and broke free of the **norms** of their childhood friendship groups.
- The **voluntary** nature of running a campaign was an obstacle to success, but being in the **company** of other young campaigners was an important motivator.
- Some campaigners felt that voluntary campaigning was looked down upon e.g. by parents or peers, and many campaigners were looking to **professionalise** their role. The income would allow them to spend more time on the campaign, and give more credibility and status to the work.
- Setting **clear** and **realistic** campaign **goals** helped get other young people involved in their campaigns.
- Include **activities** that people can get involved in without having to be an expert on climate change.
- Campaigners are keen to get more people involved, people from a wider background than have previously got involved in climate campaigning.
- Existing well established campaigns provided **inspiration**, validation and support.

Project team



University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna
Centre for Global Change and Sustainability (gWN) / AT
Sybille Chiari / Project lead
Sybille.Chiari@boku.ac.at



Climate Outreach – Oxford / UK
Chris Shaw / corresponding author
Chris.shaw@climateoutreach.org

University of Brighton, Centre for Spatial,
Environmental and Cultural Politics / UK
Julie Doyle



University of Brighton

Environment Agency Austria – Vienna / AT
Sonja Völler

umweltbundesamt[®]

Climate Media Factory – Potsdam /DE
Bernd Hezel & Ephraim Broschkowski



O N C A - Brighton / UK
Persephone Pearl & Keith Ellis

O N
C A

Citation:

Shaw, C., Chiari, S., Doyle, J. Völler, S., Hezel, B., Pearl, P. (2019): Recommendations for engaging young people with climate change campaigns.

June 2019

powered by **klima+
energie
fonds**