

Engaging youth

Key Details

Key terms: individual behaviour, systems change, degrowth, carbon tax, social justice, elections

Demographic profile:

Youth (18–34 years old)

Sources: Climate of Change Survey (2020), Climate of Change Survey (2018), Panoramic Survey (2018), General Population survey (2019), Partner-Supporter Survey SSHRC (2019), COVID & Environment Focus Groups (2020); Baromètre Climatique (2020); Climate Outreach

Reports: *Which Canadians support nature-based solutions to the climate Emergency?* (2021); *Who do Canadians blame for climate change?* (2021); *Radicals, Reformers, Lifestylers* (2020); *Building support for carbon pricing among Canadians* (2017); *Care of nature, care of Community* (2020); *Millennial Paradox* (2019); *Is bad weather good?* (2019); *Shifting Perceptions, Influential values, and the Power of Trust* (2018); *Shades of Green* (2017)

Note: Reports not listed here did not feature any relevant information on youth.

Below, in a *Nutshell*, are some key recommendations on youth, drawn from EcoAnalytics research since 2016. To see the recommendations, check out the Understand your audience: Youth *Nutshell*.

Better engagement—Recommendations

Experiment with nature-based activities: These nurture biocentric values, which are strongly correlated with engagement. For example, work with schools, community centres, and campuses to get youth into nature (in urban areas or elsewhere) (*Care of nature*, 2020, p.5).

Cross-pollinate with other interests: Engage people who interact with food-related groups, coops, social justice groups, and political parties to participate in civic and other movement-building behaviours and to donate money and/or time. Create opportunities for youth to volunteer or work at your organizations. Develop more programs that build the leadership capacity of youth to organize and run their own campaigns. Work with universities or schools to set up chapters or recruit new supporters. (*Care of nature*, 2020, p.5).
→ [Climate Outreach](#) also recommends engagement with youth at turning points in their lives, like starting new jobs or moving to university.

Get grandparents involved: Promote memberships or donations by parents or grandparents on behalf of their children and grandchildren to engage them in nature-based activities sponsored by nature study, nature appreciation clubs, watershed protection, and land trust groups (*Care of nature*, 2020, p.4).

Engage with systemic change: Broaden engagement and renew your supporter-base by targeting youth, people on the left, and politically alienated¹ young men. Test messages about environmental issues through the lens of systemic change. Talk about jobs, social justice, the meaning of Earth Overshoot Day and the need to reduce consumption and waste, embrace degrowth, protect endangered species, etc. (*Radicals, Reformers, Lifestylers*, 2020, p. 26).

→ [Climate Outreach](#) also recommends highlighting the moral and justice dimensions of climate change. The UK-based think-and-do tank found that young activists were motivated by the concern for the injustices of climate responsibility and impacts.

Build support for a more effective carbon tax: As of the fall of 2018, one analysis found that to build support for the carbon tax, one should target youth, newcomers, and undecided voters, as well as supporters of the federal Liberal, NDP, Green and BQ (*Powerful Words*, 2018, p.16). Test whether these groups would help advocate for higher carbon taxes with greater effect.

¹ Political alienation refers to citizens' apathy from or rejection of the political system. Lack of trust or faith in government institutions and a sense of estrangement from the democratic processes might lead to voter abstention, for example.

Individual Behaviours— Recommendations

If you are looking to influence individual behaviours, be aware of certain psychological barriers that prevent change among youth. Here are some tactics for overcoming those barriers:

Focus on high-impact actions: To avoid feelings of helplessness, highlight solutions that have a high impact on climate change (such as healthy eating habits or limited consumption, rather than recycling or changing light bulbs). Show how changes could benefit youth personally as well as the environment. Relate abstract threats to local environmental protection, such as saving money, eliminating waste, or having an impact on other people.

Reward progress: Young people may be more motivated by personal achievement than their older counterparts and may be more motivated to change their behaviours if they can measure whether they are doing enough to protect the environment.

Normalize caring about the environment:

Tap social norms to address the fear of letting people down or embarrassment about trying to lower one's environmental impact. For example, activate or create new norms via social media and provide youth with more opportunities to share information about their engagement and compare their performance with their friends.

→ [Climate Outreach](#) recommends talking about campaigning and environmental action as part of a new social reality.

Note: If your organization participated in the SSHRC research in 2019, look at *Millennial Paradox* or *Radicals, Reformers, Lifestylers* to see the differences between youth in the general population compared to your supporters. That information will help you choose an appropriate tactic depending on your objective: deepening engagement or recruiting new supporters.

A few storytelling tips from [Climate Outreach](#):

1. Emphasize the clear, short-term wins.
2. Remember values and emotions are just as meaningful as science and facts.
3. Work with youth to craft messages and leverage peer-to-peer communication.

Limitations of the data we have available on youth:

1. Our research on youth reflects national averages, and so far doesn't provide information about age as it intersects with other axes of identity: urban/rural, ethnicity, region, income, and gender, etc. Engaging with systemic change is not likely to alienate many supporters of environmental groups (since few have the consumerist faith in lifestyle-change as a driver of environmental protection).
2. The impact of this conversation on the relatively large group of "Reformists" is unclear (*Radicals, Reformers, Lifestylers*, 2020).
3. We have some evidence about how youth engage with traditional media, but not how social media is used as a tool for advocacy or education.
4. A few outstanding questions for future research:
 - a. To what extent are youth politically alienated?
 - b. How can we make environmental issues personally relevant for youth?
 - c. What do youth perceive to be the most effective channels for effecting change?

Additional resources:

- Fact-sheet: [Meaningful youth engagement to advance global change](#)
- Fact-sheet: [10 ways to meaningfully engage underrepresented youth](#)
- Checklist: [Youth Leadership Development Program Checklist](#)
- Academic Paper: [Youth-led Social Change](#)
- Report: [Building Bridges for Climate Action: Engagement Strategies for Millennials](#)
- Climate Outreach: [Recommendations for engaging young people with climate change campaigns](#)
- [Un point cinq: Baromètre de l'action climatique \(2020\)](#)