This manual is primarily developed as a tool for students and program providers. For providers, it includes a number of suggested strategies for helping students get started in climate activism and sustainable transportation projects. Teachers, informal educators, and mentors are uniquely positioned to provide students with guidance in connecting the dots about climate change and to provide support for their actions and solutions.

I. Building Relationships

Building a relationship of mutual respect with students is no different than with anyone else in your professional network. An informal educator has a different role than a teacher. Our job is not to impart knowledge but to engage the students in a process for mutual learning and benefit.

- **Acknowledgement of their skills**: By the time a student is in high school they have at least 10 years of classroom education behind them. They have tools, resources, and knowledge. They also have individual interests and passions. It is our job as providers to help grow their capacity and help them apply those skills in a real-world application.

- **Positive attitude**: When you project optimism, you are more fun to be around. The public is worried about climate change but that doesn’t mean we need people in panic mode. We need short, medium, and long-term sustainability solutions and we do our best thinking when we feel hopeful.

- **Good communication**: The ability to listen well and clearly articulate your ideas is a life skill no matter what the job. Find out from students what social media and communications platforms they like and use them. Even highly enthusiastic teenagers need frequent check-ins if you are going to stay connected and achieve your common goal. Set up your next meeting at the end of the last meeting.

- **Share knowledge**: You are an expert in your field. A collaborative model does not mean that you give up your intelligence, experience, and expertise. ECO2school has developed a number of materials to help communicate program objectives and connect the dots between climate, sustainability, and transportation. (See the Supplemental Materials at the end of each chapter.)

- **Be open**: Sincere leaders are far more effective at motivating people because they inspire trust and admiration not just through their words but also with their actions. This requires vulnerability, transparency, and integrity. Students know pretty quickly if you are genuine in your interactions with them. If you don’t care, neither will they.
II. Leadership Development

With the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s recent 2019 report estimating a mere ten years until the world reaches a handful of climate tipping points, there is increasing awareness of the need for climate action. Young people have a right to be nurtured, protected, and treated with respect and they need to be involved, consulted, and listened to. As leaders and mentors, we face choices about how we choose to direct our influence. Traditional programs often offer a predetermined “box” of resources and activities, and implement a project without consulting youth in both the development and the process. Leadership is more than just helping students understand the root causes and effects of climate change and telling them what they should do to solve those problems; nor is it about simply providing support without sharing expertise and experience. Authentic leadership is about finding the balance between predetermined program activities and youth-led activities; furthermore, leadership requires a partnership in which all views and interests are articulated and represented. (See Hart’s Ladder of Participation handout.) Genuine leadership is about being a resource for students that allows them to grow as individuals in a way that benefits civil society and the communities we live in, and to work towards a positive future for the planet. Simply put, it’s about providing the minimum of support needed to maximize their voice, action, and ultimately their own power and agency. Authentic engagement, social inclusion, and targeted assistance for disadvantaged communities rightfully remain at the core.

The social discipline window provides a model of support that enables authentic engagement.

III. Building Your Program

You’ve seen the Power of Collective Action infographic (below). Being in 10 schools gives you a greater reach and impact than being in one school. How do we bring our amazing program and expertise to the next school (and then the next one, and the next one)? There is no one, magic way to build a program, but being thoughtful, nimble, and creative with the resources you have is a start.

Plan where you want to be. Spend some time doing a needs assessment. Are there schools or communities in the area that are underserved? Are there schools with great walk and bike potential but little activity? Set a goal or target for yourself in the program.

Build momentum. A strong network will not just happen. It takes work. Are there like-minded organizations or collaborative groups that meet regularly? Finding common
ground will allow you to be a resource for each other and maximize your reach and overall impact.

**Utilize your network.** An ally can help you get a foot in the door and anyone can be an ally. A favorite student from your middle or elementary program or a former Safe Routes parent whose students aged out of the K-8 program. Do students have a community service or senior project requirement? Find out if there is an environmental or cycling club on campus and who their teacher advisor is. Who is the school's leadership teacher? You could work with them to promote a green or bike-spirit week. Climate change is now a core concept in the Next Generation Science Standards. *(See our website for NGSS-connected climate, transportation, and sustainability curricula.)* Who is the teacher responsible for addressing those standards? Offer yourself and the program as a resource. One person can be all you need to start a successful service-learning project.

**Share your program.** How you tell the story of what you do is important. Once you have identified your point of contact, set up an introductory meeting. In high schools, we work primarily with clubs and classes. Even though administration is not as involved as in elementary schools, it is still important to share what you are doing. Meeting administrators will help set the tone for your relationship with the school and can provide an invaluable perspective about the school you will be working with. Bringing some basic information about your program’s mission, history, and successes is vital, along with any graphics or basic statistics that show the specific need for your program. *(Use the Supplemental Materials to help make the case for your program. See the Evaluation chapter for information on how to develop school-specific materials.)* Bring this information in paper copy; there is something about being able to hand someone a packet of information that adds to your legitimacy. Following up within 24 hours with electronic copies as well as a summary of the main meeting points will go a long way towards solidifying that relationship. When you finish that first meeting, set a goal together for what you are going to do next. Example: “Check out these materials and I will come back next week to meet with the rest of your club and we can decide together what we want to do.”

**Give as much as you get.** It is important that your allies feel they are getting as much from the situation as they are giving. Make yourself and your program indispensable. For teachers, this could mean curricular support; for administrators, it could mean connecting to school foundations or contributing to school newsletters or bringing resources to the school that build community and reputation. For clubs, it can be training, expertise, materials, or information. This creates a win-win scenario for you and the people you work with.

**Be flexible.** Each club, teacher, and school you work with will have an individual set of needs. Maintain the core of your program but be flexible on the details to customize the program, activities, and presentations.

“We have reached a point where we need to make big changes fast, for if we don’t, we risk losing this wonderful world we are so lucky to call home. I want to change the fear and anger of my generation and turn it into hope and action. I believe we can make a difference.”

- Solana Jolly
IV. Youth Boards

As your program grows and develops, so will the students you work with. They need somewhere to go as they expand the reach and scope of what they believe is possible. Students have a number of reasons why they want to join a board: they are trying to build their college resume, they feel isolated, they want to be with other active, engaged young people, they want to be part of bigger and more impactful actions. Whatever their reasons for wanting to engage in the larger community of activists, a board is a great landing spot. Just like setting up club meetings (see the Clubs chapter) make sure you have a clear timeframe, agenda, and goals. Kids are busy. Here are a few board benefits that keep them coming back:

- **Training.** This is a great time to focus on skill building and giving students more focused attention than they get in short lunch-hour meetings.
- **Connection to the greater community.** Having a guest speaker (e.g., a board member, local activist, or politician) is exciting and helps student deepen their connections to the greater community.
- **Community building.** Plan an action, presentation, or community workshop together.
- **Make it fun.** Kids have already spent a full day in school. Make sure the time you have together is collaborative and enjoyable.
- **Food.** If you feed them, they will come. Cookies and popcorn are delicious but so many students come to meetings after a full day (including sports) and healthy, hearty, and homemade is always a plus.

V. Supplemental Materials

- Why Transportation?
- Connect the Dots
- The Power of Collective Action
- Make Your Actions Count
- Consumption-Based Greenhouse Gas Footprint
- Roger Hart’s Ladder of Participation

The Climate Center’s youth board members meet with Carl Mears, climate scientist and IPCC contributor.