Introduction

There has been no other time in human history that we have tampered with nature to the extent we do today. According to the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) the largest contribution to an increase in global temperature is an increase in the atmospheric concentration of CO2 and an important contributor to the increase is anthropogenic by source. (IPCC AR5) There are many negative effects associated with climate change and people need to begin taking action now, including youth. Despite the belief that today’s youth are politically apathetic, young people are more civically and politically active than in the past. (Rossi, Torres, Giddens) Many are not active because they have not found ways in which they can truly make a difference. I ask how can we better engage today’s youth and how are they doing so? Why Engage Youth?

There are many reasons it should be a focus to engage youth in order to address climate change. Being younger, youth along with future generations will be the ones facing the harsher effects of climate change. Because of this they have a right to be a part in decisions. Historically speaking youth have been key components in political institution from the Obama Presidential Election in 2008 to the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. It has been shown youth have good insight for ideas to combat climate change (Petrasek) and that those that become engaged tend to become more involved as adults. (Giddens) While adults should engage youth they should also keep in mind that the young generation of men and women is their problem. It is their lives. (Putnam, Sloam, File) Key Motivational Factors

- Feeling respected by those in power, including parents when they voice their opinions and ideas.
- Present achievements: Today’s young people tend to be goal oriented and want to see results.
- Internationally, many of the youth populations reject forms of traditional politics. Through these forms of politics, many of these youth believe they can’t make a difference and so they turn to less “accepted” forms of engagement. The drive to become engaged is there, they only need to be guided.
- Peer-Community is important: Often times organizations, workshops, and other events are initially responsible for engaging youth in taking action. It has been found that youth tend to sustain their engagement because of friendships and the community they find themselves in after becoming engaged.
- Youth often become engaged when if both fulfills their moral perception of doing good, while also contributing to the improvement of the engaged individual. (Examples of this could be volunteering and adding it to one’s resume, or helping people while simultaneously improving an important career skill.)

Three Models to Engage today’s Youth

I examined my findings and came up with motivational factors that are key to successfully engaging youth in political action and compared these to three ways I have found to be effective forms of methods for engagement. They meet many of the key motivational factors I have found. These are

Conferences

Example: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of the Parties

The gathering at the UNFCCC in Paris this December features many different forms in which youth are involved. NGOs, experts, and many others gather to discuss, and decide our future for the risks of global climate change. Youth will be collaborating the weekend before the Conference begins at the Conference of Youth (COY) where over 5000 youth gather to let their voices be heard. There are also speakers who will be talking about the importance and results of youth becoming involved at Earth University, a pavilion of the private sector during the discussions. Youth from around the world come here and bring what they have learned to other young people. (UNFCCC.int)

Organizations

Example: Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy

Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy educates and empowers people to engage in solutions to climate change. YEA! MN program focuses on youth engagement. Climate Generation supports a network of high school environmental clubs working together across the Twin Cities Metro to empower student leadership on climate change solutions, facilitate shared skills and strategies, and take coordinated action on campus and in the wider community. After attending events, talking with, and observing I believe that this organization contains all of the key motivational factors and is successful largely because of it. Two notable ones is peer-community, which I observed at an event. Despite coming from different schools and backgrounds the young people involved are friends and it seems so are the adults running the organization. They also use conferences as a means of getting youth involved which would be one of my recommendations to an organization focused on engaging youth. (Climate Generation Org.)

Alternative Methods

Alternative forms of participation should not be left out. I have looked at many other forms personally and through peer-reviewed articles:

- Children Books/Literature
- Music—Grind 4 Greens hip hop concert to raise awareness among inner city youth about the causes and effects of climate change
- Wilderness Centers - including early interaction with the environment while in youth
- Activism—Historically activism has led to many changes in political thinking and ideologies. It is also familiar with the youth population. This needs to be recognized as an effective form of climate engagement.

It’s their problem. It’s their lives

- Will Steger, Founder of Climate Generation

Methods

First, I examined peer reviewed articles and other scholarly sources obtaining to youth engagement in political politics. Second, I studied Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy. Through interviews, observing at events and following their updates I address how the organization successfully engages youth and the implications that has for organizations being an effective way to engage youth to become more politically active for climate change prevention, mitigation, and adaptation.