



PLANETWISE

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Module 05: Democratic Participation & Environmental Advocacy

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Introduction

This module empowers young people to take an active role in shaping environmental decisions through civic engagement. It introduces democratic tools—like public consultations, local councils, and policy advocacy, that allow youth to influence sustainability at both local and EU levels. By exploring real-world campaigns, message framing, and stakeholder communication, participants learn how to transform climate awareness into political action. The module also builds confidence in presenting ideas, lobbying decision-makers, and mobilizing communities to drive lasting environmental change.

Why Civic Engagement Matters

Civic engagement gives young people the power to influence the systems and decisions that shape their environment, communities, and future. In the face of accelerating climate change, youth participation is essential to ensuring that sustainability efforts are equitable, ambitious, and future-focused. When young voices are included in decision-making whether through youth councils, consultations, campaigns, or public advocacy they bring fresh ideas, long-term thinking, and a sense of urgency that institutions often lack. Active engagement also builds democratic literacy, fosters accountability, and strengthens the legitimacy of climate policies. Simply put, a sustainable future cannot be built without the participation of those who will inherit it.



Module Objectives

What You Will Explore

In this module, you will gain a deeper understanding of how environmental governance operates at both EU and local levels. You will examine the European Green Deal and discover how its ambitious goals are implemented through local councils and regional action plans. This foundation helps you see where your voice fits into broader sustainability structures and decisions.

What You Will Practice

Through practical, hands-on learning, you will:

- Practice lobbying and advocacy techniques in simulated settings
- Learn to write and deliver persuasive messages for campaigns and stakeholders
- Plan and develop a real-world, community-based sustainability initiative that reflects your goals and values



Understanding the EU Green Deal

The European Green Deal is the European Union's flagship strategy for achieving climate neutrality by 2050. More than just a climate plan, it is a comprehensive policy framework that aims to transform the EU's economy, infrastructure, and society to operate within planetary boundaries while promoting prosperity and social fairness. It covers key sectors such as energy, transport, agriculture, construction, and waste management, and integrates innovation, biodiversity protection, and circular economy principles throughout.

At its core, the Green Deal seeks to decouple economic growth from resource use and greenhouse gas emissions. It introduces ambitious legislative packages, such as the "Fit for 55" plan—designed to cut emissions by at least 55% by 2030. It also includes measures to support vulnerable regions and communities through mechanisms like the Just Transition Fund, ensuring that no one is left behind in the shift toward a sustainable future.

Green Deal Highlights

- Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050
- Promoting a circular economy
- Investing in biodiversity and clean energy
- Creating inclusive green jobs and education



Local Government and Climate Action

Local governments play a pivotal role in transforming the goals of the European Green Deal into practical, day-to-day changes that citizens experience in their communities. While national and EU institutions develop overarching policies and frameworks, it is local councils and municipalities that are often responsible for implementing them on the ground.

Key responsibilities include urban planning decisions, such as approving new housing developments or redesigning public transport routes, as well as managing energy consumption in public infrastructure, waste collection and recycling, sustainable land use, and the preservation or creation of green spaces. Local authorities also regulate building standards, oversee environmental education programs, and administer local funding for climate and sustainability projects.



Lobbying Simulation: “Meet Your MEP”

This interactive role-playing activity is designed to simulate a structured dialogue between youth advocates and a Member of the European Parliament (MEP). The aim is to provide participants with an experiential understanding of how citizen lobbying works in the context of EU environmental policymaking. Through this simulation, youth step into the roles of environmental campaigners, policy advisors, community representatives, and journalists, while one or more peers or facilitators play the role of an MEP.

The purpose of the exercise is not only to rehearse how to present a policy demand or sustainability proposal, but also to understand how EU representatives think, negotiate, and respond to different stakeholder interests. It encourages youth to consider what makes an argument compelling—whether it's a powerful personal story, data-driven evidence, alignment with EU goals, or the ability to address concerns such as cost, feasibility, or public opinion.

Simulation Goals

Build confidence in formal communication

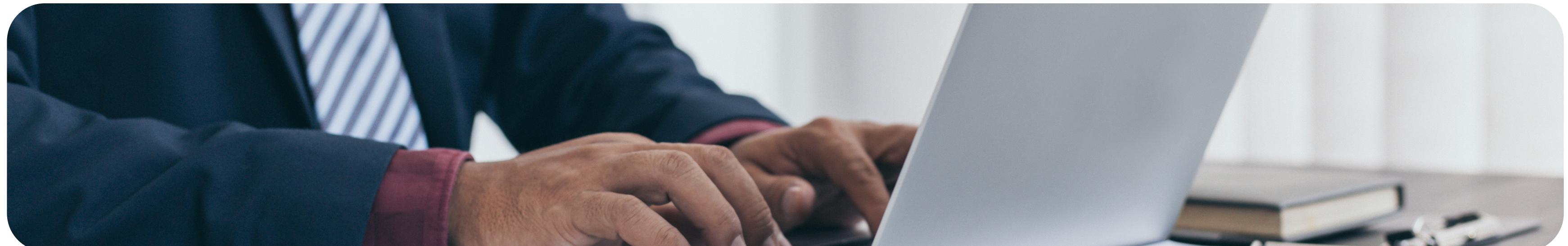
- Learn to speak clearly and assertively in structured, high-stakes settings with policymakers or institutional leaders.

Practice presenting evidence-based arguments

- Craft messages that combine facts, data, and ethical reasoning to support your position on environmental issues.

Understand institutional dynamics

- Gain insight into how Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) prioritize concerns, balance competing interests, and make decisions within EU governance structures.





Preparing for the Simulation

Preparation is a crucial part of the lobbying simulation, allowing participants to approach the dialogue with clarity, structure, and confidence. Each team selects an environmental issue that aligns with current EU policy discussions or local sustainability needs. Common topics may include funding for public transportation, bans on single-use plastics, school energy efficiency programs, or expanding green job opportunities for youth.

Participants are guided to develop short position papers concise written documents that outline their stance, key arguments, supporting data, and a clear policy request. These papers mirror real-world lobbying materials presented to policymakers. In addition to written materials, teams are encouraged to draft talking points that help them speak confidently during the dialogue and respond to questions without reading verbatim from a script.

Sample Advocacy Issues

- Introducing climate literacy in schools
- Protecting local wetlands
- Funding youth-led urban gardens
- Installing solar panels on public buildings





What is Message Framing?

Message framing refers to the strategic way we structure and present information so that it resonates with a specific audience. Rather than changing the core facts, framing changes how those facts are interpreted and understood. Effective framing helps your message stand out, feel more relevant, and inspire action.

Key Points on Framing:

- Focuses on how, not what, you communicate
- Framing doesn't change the facts—it shapes how those facts are perceived by your audience.
- Highlights shared values and emotions
- Effective messages tap into themes like fairness, health, jobs, or responsibility to future generations.
- Makes abstract issues feel personal
- By using relatable language or storytelling, you bring global issues down to the local or individual level.



Press Release Essentials

A press release is a short, professional statement written for the media to announce an event, campaign, achievement, or call to action. It helps journalists understand your story quickly and decide whether to cover it in the news. A well-crafted press release improves your visibility, builds credibility, and ensures your message reaches a wider audience especially during a climate or sustainability campaign.



Key Elements of an Effective Press Release:

Catchy and informative headline

- Use strong, action-driven language that summarizes your story in one sentence. It should grab attention while hinting at your main message.

Example: “Local Youth Launch Week-Long Bike-to-Work Climate Challenge”

- Brief and compelling opening paragraph
- This is your summary: who, what, when, where, and why. Journalists often only read the first few lines—make them count.

Body of the press release (2–3 short paragraphs)

- Provide background on your campaign, context about the issue, and why it matters. Include recent statistics, goals, or expected outcomes.



Why Cycling Matters

Cycling is a simple yet powerful climate solution that contributes to healthier people, cleaner air, and more livable cities. As part of a broader transition to sustainable mobility, promoting cycling directly supports both environmental and social goals. It also empowers communities to reclaim urban spaces and reduce dependence on fossil-fuel transportation.

How Cycling Supports Sustainability:

Reduces CO₂ emissions

- Bicycles are zero-emission vehicles. Each bike trip replaces a car ride, cutting greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. Over time, widespread cycling adoption can significantly reduce a city's transport carbon footprint.

Decreases traffic congestion

- Cycling takes up less space on the road and reduces the number of vehicles during peak hours. This leads to shorter travel times, less idling, and fewer delays in urban centers.

Improves public health

- Regular cycling improves cardiovascular health, boosts mental well-being, and reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity. It also helps lower healthcare costs over time.



Campaign Planning Steps

1. Set a Clear and Measurable Goal

Establish a specific objective that can guide your actions and inspire participants. A goal should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

- Example: "Encourage 100 people to bike at least 1,000 km collectively over two weeks."
- Setting a numerical target makes it easier to track progress and celebrate success.

2. Identify and Involve Key Stakeholders

Reach out to local organizations, schools, municipalities, and community leaders who can help amplify your campaign. Building partnerships increases your campaign's legitimacy, resources, and reach.

- Schools can involve students through classroom challenges.
- Local businesses might sponsor prizes or offer discounts for cyclists.
- Municipal councils may help promote or even co-brand the campaign.





Design Inclusive and Fun Activities

Incorporate activities that appeal to a wide audience—young people, parents, workers, and older residents alike. Examples include:

- Themed ride days (e.g., “Fancy Dress Friday” or “Family Cycling Sunday”)
- Competitions for best photo, longest ride, or most consistent commuter
- Group rides, mini-festivals, or repair workshops

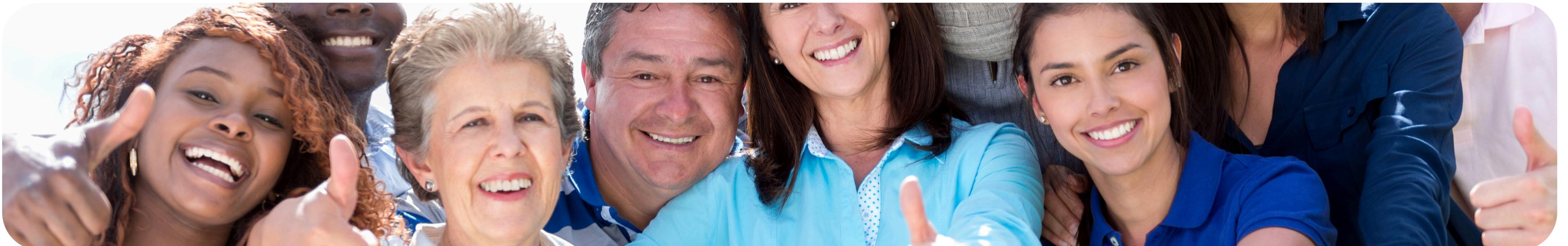
Use Creative and Targeted Communication

- Catchy visuals and youth-friendly language are essential to attract attention and encourage sharing. Utilize a mix of platforms:
- Social Media: Instagram Reels, TikTok videos, challenge hashtags
- Visual Assets: Eye-catching posters, infographics, short videos
- Storytelling: Share participant stories to make the campaign relatable
- Memes and humorous content can also boost engagement—just keep it on-message

Presenting to Stakeholders

Stakeholders are the individuals, groups, or institutions that either influence your project's success or are directly impacted by it. These may include local government officials, school administrators, potential funders, community organizations, local business owners, educators, parents, or even the media. Recognizing who your stakeholders are—and understanding their interests and concerns is essential to building partnerships, securing support, and ensuring your sustainability project creates lasting impact.

When presenting to stakeholders, it's not just about what you say—it's how you say it. Different audiences respond to different motivations. A city planner may prioritize feasibility and budget; a teacher may value learning outcomes; a local business might look for visibility or return on investment. Tailoring your message ensures your proposal is both persuasive and relevant.





Who Are Common Stakeholders in Youth-Led Sustainability Projects?

- Local Government Officials – may offer logistical support, permissions, funding, or visibility
- School Leaders – can integrate your campaign into curricula or extracurricular activities
- Community Groups & NGOs – may help with outreach, volunteering, or resources
- Business Owners & Sponsors – might offer in-kind support, media exposure, or prizes
- Citizens & Families – especially if the project affects public space, transport, or behavior

Knowing Your Audience

What does this stakeholder care about?

- A mayor may focus on visibility, public health, and community impact.
Small groups (5–8 people)
- A teacher may be concerned with educational value and student safety.
- A business owner may look for branding opportunities or customer engagement.



What language or tone will be most effective?

- Use professional, concise language for officials or funders.
- Use inspirational and story-driven language for community members or students.
- Avoid jargon unless you're speaking to experts—clarity is key.





How can I align my goals with theirs?

- Demonstrate how your project helps achieve their objectives.
- If a stakeholder is focused on reducing traffic, emphasize how your cycling campaign supports that.
- If their priority is youth empowerment, show how your initiative creates leadership opportunities for young people

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Even the most well-intentioned presentations can fall flat if common communication mistakes aren't addressed. Presenting to stakeholders—whether in local government, education, business, or civil society requires both clarity and tact. Avoiding these pitfalls ensures that your message is not just heard but well-received.

1. Don't overwhelm with jargon or statistics
2. Avoid confrontational or accusatory language
3. Don't skip the Q&A

Bonus Tips:

- Don't read slides word-for-word – Stakeholders want a conversation, not a script.
- Don't ignore body language – Make eye contact, smile, and stay engaged.
- Don't forget to follow up – A polite thank-you message and brief summary can leave a lasting impression.



Using Visuals & Data

- Strong visuals and well-chosen data don't just support your message they make it more convincing, easier to understand, and harder to forget. Whether you're presenting to local officials, school administrators, or the general public, incorporating images, charts, and statistics can help you turn abstract ideas into tangible realities.
- Visuals can simplify complex information, highlight trends, and appeal to both logic and emotion. Data, when presented clearly, adds credibility and demonstrates the real-world relevance of your proposal. Together, visuals and data make your presentation more professional, persuasive, and engaging.





Non-Formal Activity: “The Green Council Simulation”

Objective:

To engage participants in a fun and realistic role-play where they take on different stakeholder roles in a mock local council meeting, debating and voting on a sustainability proposal.

Overview:

Participants simulate a local town council meeting focused on approving or rejecting a proposed environmental initiative (e.g., launching a "Car-Free Fridays" campaign or building a community garden). Each participant is assigned a stakeholder role with unique perspectives, motivations, and potential objections.





How It Works:

1. Briefing (15–20 mins):

2. Each participant receives a short character profile and a summary of the sustainability proposal.

3. Stakeholder Preparation (15 mins):

4. Small teams or individuals prepare their arguments, questions, or statements based on their role's interests.

5. Town Hall Debate (30 mins):

6. The meeting begins. Each stakeholder gives a short speech or statement. Moderated discussion follows, where stakeholders ask questions, negotiate, and express concerns or support.

7. Vote and Debrief (15–20 mins):

8. The group votes on whether to approve the proposal. Then, facilitators guide a reflection discussion:

- What arguments were most convincing?
- How did it feel to defend a view you may not personally agree with?
- How did power dynamics or negotiation affect the outcome?





Learning Outcomes:

- Understand how diverse stakeholders approach sustainability
- Practice public speaking, negotiation, and persuasion
- Build empathy and critical thinking through role reversal
- Experience how real policies are debated and challenged in democratic processes





Conclusion

Social entrepreneurship provides a powerful framework for youth to tackle environmental challenges through sustainable and community-oriented solutions. By exploring tools such as value propositions, green business models, and legal frameworks, and engaging in interactive processes like mentoring circles and hackathons, young leaders can design ventures that create meaningful and measurable impact. The PLANETWISE project exemplifies how collaboration, creativity, and education can empower a generation of green entrepreneurs. Let this module be your first step in turning climate concern into climate action. Think green. Act social. Lead youthfully.



Thank You

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