

## Make It Personal

# Climate Change Conversations and Posters

### Conversation Guides

Climate change affects all of us—and many of us have stories about the changes we’ve noticed. You can use the Conversation Guides below to get people talking about climate change and climate action from their own perspectives and experiences. The conversations that begin with this activity can create a foundation for building climate action projects and community engagement. This activity can be fun and rewarding with nearly everyone—from people who almost never talk directly about climate change to people who work on climate change or sustainability every day.

Here are some ideas for using this activity:

- When you are working with community partners, use the Conversation Guide questions at the end of this tool to get to know your partners better and find out how they connect with climate change.
- If you have a meeting or workshop for people who are interested in climate change, try using this as an icebreaker. Ask everyone to find a partner and to take turns asking each other the questions.
- Teenagers can interview their parents, grandparents, or other adults in their communities to gain an intergenerational perspective, or other teens to gain a peer perspective.
- Students can ask these questions of scientists and environmental professionals to learn more about the people doing work related to climate change.
- Seal the interview responses in an envelope and put them away at the beginning of a training session, school year, or action project. At the end, repeat the activity and compare the responses to the earlier responses.
- Ask staff, partners and volunteers to fill out the responses on their own to allow some time for them to reflect on climate change in their own lives.
- Consider using the activity in combination with other storytelling tools, like the Visual Collages.
- Use the responses from these conversations to create a Portraits of Climate Change poster campaign that focuses on real people and their climate concerns and actions (see Turn Your Interviews into a Community Poster Campaign).

**Objective:** Help people see their personal connections to climate action, and collect personal and community stories

**Audience:** Middle school and up

**Materials:** Conversation guide (included), notebook, and pen

**Time Needed:** 5-10 minutes per conversation or longer if you want to talk more

## Instructions

Sit down for a conversation with someone and ask the questions that follow. You can vary the order of the questions to keep a nice flow to the conversation. You can omit questions if you want to save time or if you are talking to someone who doesn't think a lot about climate change. The conversations will probably take five to ten minutes, but you can expand as much as you both care to talk. Bring a notebook and pen with you and make sure to jot down notes for later. Once you've done a bunch of interviews, you and your fellow interviewers should look through your notes to identify what kinds of things people seem to be engaged with and interested in overall.

There are no right or wrong answers. The goal is to talk about personal connections to climate change and to gather stories. Remind people to answer the questions based on their own ideas and experiences. They don't have to try to answer for anyone else or fill in for the person on the street.

## Conversation Guide 1: For People Already Thinking About Climate Change

**Note: If you aren't sure whether your interviewees are engaged in climate change, use Conversation Guide 2.**

- When did you recognize climate change as an important problem?
- What changes related to climate have you noticed or experienced?
- How do you think climate change is affecting you or will affect your life in the future?
- Are you engaged in any climate actions—activities intended to reduce greenhouse (or carbon dioxide) gas omissions or make it easier to adapt to changes caused by climate? (Note: If they aren't doing anything, guide them to consider rewards of future action.)
- What is fun or rewarding about these activities?
- What is another issue, besides climate change, that you're engaged in, and how?
- Do you think this is connected to climate change in any way? How so/not? (Note: If not, see if you can help make the connection.)
- Would you like to do more in any of these areas? How might you do that?

## Conversation Guide 2: For People Unengaged with Climate Change

### ***Version A: Starting with Outdoor Activities***

These questions are framed for people who might not have thought much about climate change. They are intended to help them think about what they are already doing that's good for the climate as well as what more they might do, building on their existing life activities and interests.

Introduce your questions by couching them within the context of conversation. For example, Brookfield Zoo in Brookfield, IL, engages visitors in this conversation in their Great Bear Wilderness exhibit, while visitors are observing polar bears. They might start with something like this:

*Opening Line:* This exhibit explores how polar bears interact with their environment. How do *you* interact with *your* environment where *you* live?

- What's your outdoor activity? Where do you go to engage with nature, and what do you do? (*Follow up with more questions to learn more about their interests and activities.*)

*Connect to Climate Change:*

“We are exploring ways to help make life easier and more enjoyable for people and animals, like the polar bear [or whatever animal is in the exhibit the guest is in], as climate change makes life more challenging. In the Arctic, as ice melts, polar bears are finding it harder to make their homes and find food [or adjust to focus on other animal]. Here in the Midwest, we are also experiencing changes, including more extreme weather events, with heat waves, flooding, and more hundred-degree summer days. We can have a positive effect on animals and nature—and many people don't realize this.”

- How do you think climate change is affecting the activities you're involved in, or might affect them in the future? (*If they don't know or aren't sure, suggest possible connections and explore them together. For example, if the person enjoys riding their bike, steer the conversation towards widespread overreliance on personal automobiles and the importance of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure to reduce the use of fossil fuels, the overuse of which is a major driver of climate change.*)
- Are you involved in any kind of community efforts to support these activities that you love? If so, please tell me about them. If not, do you know of any that you could get involved in? (*Help the person identify community-level climate actions that connect to their interests. For example, following on the bike interest above, you could suggest getting involved with cycling groups, local government, or openlands managers working to expand and interconnect existing bike paths in their community. You could also suggest that the person check with their local library to see what kinds of bike sharing and cycling programs are happening in the community.*)

### ***Version B: Starting with Civic Engagement***

If you know that the people you're talking with are civically engaged in some way, shape, or form, whether or not they're engaged in climate issues, you can focus right away on action. For example, Brookfield Zoo's “roving naturalists” might start a conversation with a visitor in Great Bear Wilderness like this:

*Opening Line:* “We are exploring ways to help make life easier and more enjoyable for people and animals, like the polar bear [or whatever animal is in the exhibit the guest is in], as climate change makes life more challenging. In the Arctic, as ice melts, polar bears are finding it harder to make their homes and find food [or adjust to focus on other animal]. Here in the Midwest, we are also experiencing changes, including more extreme weather events, with heat waves, flooding, and more hundred-degree summer days. We can have a positive effect on animals and nature—and many people don't realize this. We're trying to understand how people are working to make life easier and better for people and animals.”

- What's your favorite thing to do that makes life easier or better, for your family, neighbors, friends, or for animals you care about?
- When did you start getting involved in this activity, and why?
- Do you think this is connected to climate change in any way? How so/not? *(If not, see if you can help make the connection. For example, if the person says she volunteers at a local soup kitchen, you could talk about soup kitchens and food pantries around the country that are starting to garden to be able to provide healthy, local and sustainable food options. Another example: If the person says he likes planting butterfly gardens, you could explain that creating habitat for butterflies like Monarchs is an important strategy for helping wildlife adapt to changes brought about by climate change.)*
- What do you want to do next to continue helping people and/or animals improve their lives? How can you do it?

### Closing Exchange

Help the person connect their interest to climate change and community-level climate actions. *(For example, following on the soup kitchen example above, you could suggest that the person see if her soup kitchen or others near her do any gardening activities or get donations for any nearby gardens. Following on the butterfly garden example, you could suggest broadening gardening to help bumble bees, which are key pollinators of our food. You could then connect growing food to reducing carbon emissions by cutting down on food transportation miles, and even discuss donating some of the locally grown food to food pantries—a growing practice.)*

## Turn Your Interviews Into a Community Poster Campaign

As an extra component of this activity, you can create a poster campaign to spread the word about how community members are taking climate action and build community pride.

Here are examples of two climate-related poster campaigns, one at a university and one in a city:

- Proud to Be Sustainable UIC  
(<http://tinyurl.com/uicsustpostercampaign>)
- I Am Sustainable, Cleveland  
(<http://tinyurl.com/clevelandpostercampaign>)

If you create a bunch of posters, you can display them in your school, library, or around town. You can also share them on social media. These portraits help demonstrate that climate change is a local issue that people care about and want to do something about.

Ask the person you've been talking to if they would like to make a poster. If they say yes, select a quote from the interview that is especially compelling; if possible, have the person choose their own quote, as this will make them especially proud. Take a photo of the person you've been talking with (or ask them for a photo they like) and make sure they sign a photo release. Finally, create a portrait of climate change poster using the photo and the quote. You can model it on the draft here or make your own design.

**Objective:** Spread the word about how community members are taking climate action and build community pride  
**Audience:** Middle school and up  
**Materials:** Computer with this Make Your Own Poster Campaign PowerPoint template, phone or camera to take photo, Internet to upload photo to computer, and color printer; or posters can be handmade  
**Time Needed:** 20-30 minutes to make a poster; multiple days to plan and carry out a community campaign

See the sample poster at the end of this document for one possible template. If you want to use this template, we have provided it to you as a PowerPoint so you can insert your own content. See the companion tool, Make Your Own Poster Campaign PowerPoint.

If you are app-savvy, you may want to consider making your posters on your phone using a photo app such as Phonto or Typic. These are apps that allow you to create posters easily, especially if you are going to use photos on your phone. They provide poster layouts and allow posters to be easily shared on social media.

Some apps are clearly geared towards teens/pre-teens, letting you put stars, hearts, etc., on the photos, while others create more professional, sleek collages and even offer templates.

## **Use Your Interview Stories to Develop a Climate Action Project**

Through your interviews, you will learn what people are already doing related to climate action. This knowledge is a foundation for developing project ideas tailored to your community that people will likely want to get involved in. You can use the Connect Project Planning Guide tool to help you develop action ideas that take advantage of what you've learned to maximize community interest and engagement.

# I can change the climate



**I avoid driving whenever I can. I take the bus or the train to meetings, events—and even to forest preserves. I love looking out the train window as I travel—and sometimes I get some work done while travelling.**

Climate change in my community

Susan, Chicago