

COLLABORATING WITH SCHOOLS

Suggestions for Energy Committees & Community Groups

Both schools and community groups can benefit from collaborations that are strong and authentic. Service learning opportunities that allow students to get involved in their community working on real problems can enrich education. However, the help that is offered to schools or asked of teachers must match students' needs.



RELATIONSHIPS: This work is about building relationships between teachers and community members. Some teachers are happy to collaborate with community groups; for other teachers, this is not their preferred style of working. Community-linked project-based learning can be very exciting and interesting, but it also adds stress for teachers, because they must give up some control over what is happening in their classrooms. Be appreciative of the extra work they are putting in to make these projects a reality. Before coordinating a large project, it may be helpful to visit and observe students during a typical class. Understanding the big-picture structure of a school day will help you establish more realistic goals, tasks and expectations.

CHOICE: Come to the teachers with a menu of choices and invitations to real projects that are happening. It will take some discussion to find realistic and useful ways to collaborate.



Promoting energy literacy in schools and communities: VEEDP.ORG

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PROPER SCAFFOLDING: Projects that work well for schools often have these components:

- Have specific and clear goals.
- Require content knowledge which students need to use to be successful.
- Have an immediate application.
- Are supported by adult community members who can pick up slack and or take the project to completion.
- Can be broken into distinct parts some of which are to be completed by students and others may need to be completed by the community volunteers.

TIMELINES: Teachers will be able to work best with projects that fit in their curriculum. A project in a school may be completed over a short timeline (as short as two weeks, start to finish), whereas community groups may meet monthly. The teacher will need to build the project into the space in their curriculum where it works sequentially, so they will need advance planning time as well.

SAFETY: Schools will have different safety requirements. Some schools may need volunteers to go through background checks, others won't. At no point should a community volunteer be alone with a student. Even sharing photographs can be an issue, so make sure you ask a teacher before taking photos (teachers almost always have a list that lets them know if any of their students cannot be in photos).

WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS MIGHT PROVIDE:

Early-stage research on a project. Students will be better able to produce reasonable ballpark figures than precise detail.

Researching answers to finite and well-defined questions developed with the teacher beforehand.

Student-led public awareness. Students are great at rallying support in a very authentic (and visual) way. Let them help spread the word about the great work happening in your town through news articles, blog posts, public speaking engagements, booths at Town Meeting Day, farmers's markets, open houses, etc. Students LOVE this opportunity to present something real and community members appreciate their involvement.



COMMUNITY GROUPS MIGHT PROVIDE:

Grant proposals for projects at the school.

Help with school projects that may need community support to be successful, like Walk and Roll to School days, LED fundraisers, Trash on the Lawn days, etc.

Help for students with tasks like editing or data analysis on projects.

Help for school environmental clubs or green teams with discrete projects that fit both groups' goals.

WHAT IS HELPFUL

- ↑ **Share your expertise.** Teachers sometimes invite content experts from the community into their classrooms for presentations or panels.
- ↑ **Provide tools.** Give students access to real tools for a project. Providing them with air quality monitoring equipment, infrared cameras, or other technologies they might not have access to otherwise makes their learning more meaningful.
- ↑ **Be an authentic audience.** Invite the students to present their work to you. Having a real audience is very helpful for the students and helps build community. Support the students in bringing proposals to the school board, city council, or community groups.
- ↑ **Be respectful of students' priorities.** Sometimes the students' top priorities may be different than those of the community group. Supporting the students' goals can be an important part of building relationships with the school.
- ↑ **Be prepared to follow the teacher's timeline.**

WHAT ISN'T HELPFUL

- ↓ **Curriculum.** Teachers need to meet very specific curriculum standards. Curriculum suggestions are rarely helpful unless they completely align with the standards that teachers have to deliver, such as the Next Generation Science Standards, or the Common Core Standards in Math and Literacy.
- ↓ **Grunt labor requests.** Teachers do not have time in the school year to provide a labor pool for projects that aren't aligned with their academic goals.
- ↓ **False assumptions,** especially the assumption that "this stuff isn't being taught in schools." Often it *is* being taught at the appropriate age.
- ↓ **Age-inappropriate tasks.** The teacher will know what their students are capable of and what tasks support the students' education.