



# Student Toolkit

## A “work-in-progress” reference on how to best leverage your voice as a current student

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## What is the ClimateVoice Theory of Change?

Every nation needs strong climate policy if we are going to meet emission targets set out by the Paris Agreement to limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5 °C. Companies could play a crucial role with their huge influence over public policy. However, due to heavy lobbying against pro-climate legislation (especially by the fossil fuel companies) we are now on a [pathway to 4°C + global warming](#). In order to get the policies needed to address climate change passed, companies must speak out in support of and actively lobby for pro-climate policy.

Many companies currently have strong commitments to climate action, such as making their internal operations use [100% renewables](#), but they often remain silent on important climate policies. We need to change this pattern and activate companies to go **#AllinOnClimate**. To urge companies to speak out, ClimateVoice is working to mobilize the voices of the workforce. Once the workforce is engaged, it will incentivize companies to take pro-climate action in order to stay competitive, attract new talent (students like you!), and retain their current employees.

ClimateVoice was started by a multi-disciplinary team led by Bill Wehl, who headed sustainability at both Google and Facebook. Wehl saw firsthand the need to pressure companies to step up their efforts on climate to include impacting public policy. Students from around the U.S. have helped to push the efforts further. See [this article](#) for more information.

## Background on Companies' Role in Shaping Climate Policy

### How do companies [change the political discourse](#)?

Companies can be part of interest groups, actively lobby (i.e. employ professionals who are advocating to Congress about issues they care about), join or contribute to PACs (Political Action Committees, i.e. groups that pool contributions from various funders to candidates, political parties, or specific causes), and fund 527s (i.e. outside groups that collect funds to fuel campaign ads).

In the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* Supreme Court decision of 2010, financial restrictions were lifted on political advertising by corporations during elections. The First Amendment's freedom of speech was cited to apply to corporate lobbying as well as individuals. As one repercussion from the decision, oil and gas lobbying for federal elections increased from [\\$22.3 million in 2006 to \\$73.5 million in 2012](#) according to the Center for Responsive Politics. It also led to the rise of Super PACs, which unlike regular PACs, can make unlimited contributions to federal elections, though they are unable to donate directly to political candidates.

Companies like to hide where their lobbying dollars are going through their involvement in trade groups. The [most effective at blocking climate policy](#) are the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#) and the National Association of Manufacturers.

### What has been the negative impact of anti-climate lobbying?

Some companies are spending millions to halt climate policy (such as fossil fuel companies), while most others remain silent on the issue. This means that the political discourse is heavily swayed to the anti-climate side. We need a game-changer to reverse this negative impact and support pro-climate policy progress.

Here are some anti-climate lobbying examples:

- 2009 Waxman-Markey Bill--the first bill passed by the House to curb greenhouse gasses--ultimately failed after lobbyists were estimated to have decreased the probability of passage from [55% to 42%](#), incurring a social cost of \$60 billion.
- The [withdrawal](#) of the U.S. from the Paris Agreement.
- [Regulatory rollbacks](#) on methane emissions and the automotive fuel economy standards in 2018-2019.

These are just a few examples of the many pro-climate policies that have been blocked (or anti-climate policies that have passed) as a result of corporate lobbying by anti-climate interests. It's time for companies in favor of pro-climate action to bring their influence to bear to counteract the fossil fuel lobby.

### **Examples of corporate leadership on pro-climate policy advocacy:**

- [Levi Strauss](#) advocated for California's Advanced Clean Truck Regulation to decarbonize the transportation sector and incentive the deployment of electric trucks.
- Schneider Electric, Ball Corporation and others wrote a letter to the Arizona Corporation Commission supporting [strong renewable energy standards](#) and energy efficiency standards in Arizona
- Burton Snowboards, Clif Bar & Company, Facebook, IKEA Group, General Mills, Nestlé, JLL, Uplight, Ameresco, Cree Lighting, and dozens of other companies signed a letter calling for the immediate [repeal of HB6 in the Ohio Legislature](#).

### **“Greenwashing” is not the answer -- we need real policy action**

Some companies claim corporate leadership on climate action but fail to take serious action to address the problem, empty promises or hypocritical claims that are sometimes referred to as “greenwashing.”

Here are some examples of “greenwashing”:

- Exxon Mobil, Shell, Total, BP, and Chevron spend [over \\$195 million annually](#) on greenwashing branding campaigns that show what pro-climate “steps” they are taking while spending nearly \$200 million annually on anti-climate lobbying at the same time.
- ExxonMobil's has made great efforts to publicize their research on promotion of algae biofuel research. Yet, a closer look reveals that company disclosures show that only [3% of their oil capital investments](#) are directed towards this kind of sustainable research. In fact, their goal of 10,000 barrels per day by 2025 is only [0.2% of their current refinery capacity](#).
- Another common hypocrisy occurs when a company commits to using renewables but continues participating in trade alliances/ super PACs that block climate policy. If they were fully committed to climate action, these companies would direct lobbying dollars and their corporate voice towards support of pro-climate policies.
- [RE100](#) lists companies with commitments to 100% renewable energy. However, many of these companies fail to speak up on climate policy. Some are also members of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, one of the most prominent anti-climate-policy trade groups.

## Where You Come In

As a student and future employee, you can play a crucial role pushing companies to step up their role in shaping climate policy. Every action you take has a supersized climate impact, because when we get companies off the sidelines (or better yet, competing over who be the strongest advocate for climate policy) their ability to impact public policy is massive. You are, through your role as a student, uniquely positioned to take the concrete actions that will make this happen. As a student can you educate your peers on companies' current climate policy stances, organize them to effectively pressure companies to lobby for vital policies, and enlist university administrators to change the way your university itself engages with companies' climate impacts. Let's explore how to push change through each of these strategies.

If you feel passionate about leveraging your voice to support pro-climate policy, consider joining our ClimateVoice Ambassador Network. It's a unique opportunity to be a peer leader on one of the major issues of our generation. Please email [volunteer@climatevoice.com](mailto:volunteer@climatevoice.com) for more information.

### Educating your peers

The world needs individuals who publicly support the cause and understand the importance of corporate responsibility to educate others how they can push change. This is where YOU come in! There are many ways to be an advocate among your peers:

1. **Public Conversation:** Knowledge is power. Providing concrete and real information on the impact companies can have on policy is crucial. Engage in genuine conversations on why you think demanding more of the companies we might work for is important, and make use of the ideas in this toolkit to get your point across. While social distancing is keeping us physically apart, people are going to online gathering spaces to interact with others. We can utilize these new structures to educate our peers on how companies can step up to support pro-climate policies. Unsure about what a particular company is doing on climate? Check out these resources!
  - a. [InfluenceMap](#) is an independent think tank that provides data and analysis on how businesses are affecting the climate crisis. Use it as a resource to learn more about companies' existing climate initiatives. Here are [Climate Policy Scores](#) for some of the largest companies.
  - b. [The Ceres Network](#) is a climate lobbying group that is funded by member companies and acts on their behalf to push forward climate policy.
  - c. Use [The Open Secret Project](#) to identify which congress members a company supports. You can cross-reference that information with [LCV's Environmental Scorecard](#) to see if a company is supporting politicians who are pro-climate or anti-climate.
  - d. Google around! You'd be surprised at how much you can find (or not find, which tells you something too) just by searching "[company] climate policy/advocacy."

2. **Advocacy opportunities can come in many ways.** Here is a list of places where advocacy is particularly impactful.
  - a. Become a student ambassador for ClimateVoice. Email [volunteer@climatevoice.org](mailto:volunteer@climatevoice.org) for more information.
  - b. Quick intros at the beginning of classes (online or in person). Throw a blurb in the chat about how workplace choice is an effective lever for climate action!
  - c. Partnering with your local sustainability clubs to host events.
  - d. Working with student government.
  - e. Run your own virtual workshops and events.
3. **Personal Story:** There is no better way to relate to others than telling your own personal story on why you are involved, what you hope to get out of it, and your vision for the future. Start thinking of why the climate is important to you and your story behind it. Are you from a frontline community, living with environmental impacts every day? We all come from many different backgrounds and sharing our stories is powerful.
4. **Social Media Advocacy** (especially in times of COVID): Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of our society, we still have the ability to stay connected and speak up for issues that we are passionate about. Social media is a great way to engage your network and educate them about our cause. By highlighting ClimateVoice’s cause, your own personal stories, as well as the how and the why behind the work we do, social media helps us grow our reach and influence. Here are some guidelines on how you can help spread the word on social media:
  - a. **Amplify each other’s voices and stories:** We all have our own networks that mean our posts will echo to different people. In addition to engaging with content from ClimateVoice’s accounts, liking and sharing each other’s stories helps inform new people about our brand and engage them to learn more. (“Setting sail into undiscovered corners of the social graph”, to quote a ClimateVoice volunteer studying computer science.)
  - b. **Give people opportunities to take action:** Invite your followers to share the post, sign our pledge, attend an event, or even just click on a link to get more information.
  - c. **Follow our accounts!** Lastly, if you haven’t done so yet, please follow our social media accounts to keep up with the latest news from ClimateVoice.
    - i. [Twitter](#)
    - ii. [Linkedin](#)
    - iii. [Instagram](#)
    - iv. [Facebook](#)
    - v. [Youtube](#)
5. **Additional Information on Advocacy:** Don’t worry if you are unfamiliar with advocacy. We have linked some helpful resources below that can help you become a better advocate:
  - a. The following articles explain what it means to be an advocate
    - i. [What is Advocacy?](#)
    - ii. [Back to Basics: What is Advocacy?](#)

- b. [Climate Advocacy Lab](#) researches data-backed approaches to improving the efficacy of advocacy campaigns.

## Organizing your peers to pressure companies

There are a wide range of large and small concrete actions that students can take to effectively pressure companies to act. Start efforts at your university to put both these ideas and your own into action. Below are some useful ways to show prospective employers that their stance on climate policy is important to you.

1. **Publicly ask companies about their climate policy commitments and encourage your peers to ask questions too.** We need to make companies aware that we care about what they are doing towards sustainability and in supporting climate policy, which we can do through direct conversation with employers.
  - a. **Questioning Recruiters at Career Fairs:** One pressure point students have over companies is their interactions with companies at career fairs. Ask about which climate policies they have supported recently. Remember, although net zero operations is a great step forward, it is not the whole picture. Don't let the company boast about its sustainability efforts when you know there is more that needs to be done. Hold them accountable on the whole picture. What are their next steps in climate action? Our [Guide to Questioning Companies](#) contains information about how to ask questions and what questions to ask.
  - b. **Info Sessions:** Zoom info sessions provide a great platform to ask questions about a company's stance on sustainability. If speaking up is intimidating, sending your questions to the zoom session chat is a great way to make sure your concerns are heard.
  - c. **Interviews:** You can refer to our [Guide to Questioning Companies](#) for information on how to safely make your values known to prospective employers.
  - d. **After receiving an internship/job offer:** Once you have an offer, you have much more leverage. From our conversations with recruiters, we've heard that when a person is deliberating over an offer and asks specific questions or expresses specific requests, then take those questions very seriously and often filter back into the organization.
2. **Encourage your peers when they have misgivings.** We have found that although many students value sustainability, they feel uncomfortable voicing their beliefs to employers. Here are some common concerns alongside with ways to assuage their doubts.
  - a. **They don't know that they *can* spur change or that they should.** The more we get involved in advocacy, the more we learn that one person can make a tremendous amount of difference. In the wise words of the Lorax, "Unless someone cares a whole lot, it's not going to get better. It's not." Change starts with individuals, but it doesn't have to be a huge difference in how you live your life. Starting small, like choosing to speak up when the opportunity is right and actively creating opportunities to do so, is a great first step everyone can take. We have to actively shape the future we want or we can't expect it to turn out the way we'd hope.
  - b. **They don't know *how* to push for change:** Let's give them the tools to do so! In the other documents in this toolkit we have guidelines for how to interact at career fairs

and during interviews. Share these with your peers and listen to what they feel they lack. We must educate our communities about the role of corporate influence within politics and the need for employee pressure. In time, there will be more educational resources available to share. Remember, we're designing these materials based on your frontline feedback, so please tell us what else you wish you had.

**c. They are worried that being an advocate can jeopardize career prospects:**

Advocacy can be done in a positive and constructive tone. For example, speaking up at the career fair or during an interview communicates that you care about the company and its future. Encourage the student to start the conversation with a nod to something positive the company has done towards sustainability, which shows you've done homework on the company. Companies want individuals that will make them better, but not rock the boat too much. Communicate that the students' concerns are valid, but that you should not feel at risk to miss out on job opportunities if you are speaking with respect, a desire to learn, and an eagerness to make the company better.

**d. They don't care about climate:** Leave them with a compelling question or statement as an invitation to change their mind in the future. If you're not part of the solution then you are part of the problem.

**e. They are busy and the climate isn't at the forefront of their minds:** Remind them that asking a question takes 10 seconds. Repetition from a bunch of students is important, and that means each student doesn't have to take on too much.

**3. Sign the Pledge:** One of the first we ask of students is to sign the [Climate Voice Pledge](#) to go #AllinOnClimate. Once your peers learn more about our cause and about your personal story, let's get that pledge!

**a. The Purpose of the Pledge:** The pledge is an indicator to companies about how many people care about this mission. It is a tool we can use to go to a certain company that recruits at your university and say, "X number of students at university X (anonymous or not) have signed this and care about what your company does on this issue." It is another point of influence we have over corporate action.

**b. What the pledge means:** On the ClimateVoice website, you will see that signing the pledge means you pledge to "prioritize, mobilize and vocalize." We fully want students to embrace this mentality, but we sometimes heard concerns from students about the commitment to work for companies that are fully in line with the corporate vision presented in our theory of change. This is important: We are not asking individuals to quit their jobs. As a pledgee of ClimateVoice you will do your best to push your company forward no matter where you work. We found success when we said the pledgee was committing to a spectrum of actions, on one end simply adding yourself to an indicator for companies about how many students care and on the other a commitment to fully align your career and actions with this vision.

**c. Potential student concerns:** If students are worried about signing with their name, assure them that signing the pledge can be anonymous. We need their name and email to be able to follow up with them, but if they prefer, they can ask us to keep their information private.

## Working with university administrators

- 1. Engage with Career Services:** Eventually, we hope that it is a requirement of all companies attending the career fair to be required to answer a set of questions about their climate actions, and have a score or digest of this information prominently displayed to every student looking through the list of companies. Collecting and highlighting this information will not only send a strong message to the company about the scrutiny they're facing on climate from potential employees, but will also be genuinely useful for your peers when choosing between employers. Working with career services to start this questioning and highlighting is key. Here is a list of questions to encourage career services to ask all companies when they sign up to attend the fair:

- a.** Do you accept the science of climate change?
- b.** What is your company doing to actively address climate change? What are your next steps?
- c.** Do you have an internal plan for net zero emissions by 2050 while still being profitable? If yes, have you made that plan/policy publicly available?
- d.** Do you advocate for public policy that addresses the climate crisis?

To see an example of this in action, check out MIT's career fair website (<https://career-fair.mit.edu/2020-sustainability>)! MIT students and administrators successfully teamed up to do this, and are now compiling their feedback to make it even better next year..

- 2. How to communicate this information to your peers:** This can be done through emailing out the company responses before the fair, having a "badge" that each company has at the fair depending on their answers, organizing the layout of the room based on the responses. It is crucial that students have access to this information before interacting with these companies. Let's brainstorm together what could be effective.