

## Making Democracy Work for the Earth: Engage with Candidates this Election Season

In “Losing Earth,” many of the people making decisions about the future of our planet have something in common: they hold political office. On November 6, 2018, the United States government will hold midterm elections for 435 congressional seats, 35 Senate seats, 36 state governors, and a whole host of municipal offices. Making your voice heard in local and state elections is a powerful way to effect change.

### State Elections:

As a class, choose one political race in your state to focus on. You can find a list of House and Senate candidates by state [here](#); use a Google search to find your state’s gubernatorial candidates. If they have held public office before, you may also be able to find their voting record! Start by searching their names [here](#).

Identify candidates’ positions on environmental issues by reading statements on their official websites and/or coverage in local newspapers. Do they have a plan to make your state more environmentally sustainable? Have they expressed that this is a priority for them? Choose one or more of the following options to engage with your state’s candidates:

#### **Write a Letter to the Editor**

Newspapers impact how people feel about issues and what actions policymakers take. Influence your state candidates by taking to the headlines!

Local newspapers usually print a page of “Letters to the Editor” where readers can express their views about a topic that paper has covered. Use the information you learn about state candidates’ environment positions/records to write a letter to the editor weighing the pros and cons of one or both candidates’ environmental friendliness.

#### **Connect with Your Candidates Online**

Find the candidates’ official profiles on social media. (You can find these profiles on their campaign websites.) Pose a question to them about their position on an environmental issue that matters to you, being sure to post it to their page directly or tag them in the post.

## Municipal Elections:

Local politicians' decisions have a direct impact on your day-to-day life. What's more, you can more easily amplify your voice in the local arena because municipal officials' constituencies are smaller. Find out what municipal elections are being held in your community this November. Read about the candidates' positions on local environmental issues on their official websites and/or in your local newspaper. To find out more and engage with them directly, take one of the following actions:

### **Candidates in Your Classroom**

Invite a candidate for local office to talk to your class about their plans to make your community more environmentally friendly and sustainable. Do some research in advance to find out what environmental challenges your community is facing, and prepare questions for the candidate about what they will do to help. Take notes while they speak to you, and let them know their visit is "on the record." You may be able to publish a report on their environmental positions in your school or local newspaper.

### **Host a Town Hall on Your Local Environment**

Organize an environmental **town hall** at your school. A town hall is a forum for candidates to present and debate their ideas on one or more issues with questions raised by audience members. Invite all candidates running for a particular office to attend and ask them to prepare a short statement on how they plan to make your community more environmentally friendly and sustainable.

Select one student as moderator; they will welcome the candidates and audience and transition between sections of the event (candidate statements, questions from the audience, closing statements). Select a second student as timekeeper to ensure candidates have equal time to present their statements and answer questions. For more information on how to host and format a town hall and other types of debates, see [these pointers](#). Consider holding the town hall as an after-school assembly, inviting the entire student body and community members. Be sure to advertise the town hall in your school, around town, and online. Finally, create a strong list of questions about local environmental issues as a class and be prepared to ask them at the town hall to ensure a lively debate.