

## ADVOCACY PACKETS

# INTERSECTIONAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

How to make your environmentalism inclusive of all people

## INTRODUCTION

As young individuals, we see environmental issues in our community and on the news and want to take action to protect our future. Often it can be difficult to know where to start or how to enact lasting change as a student. But students around the globe are working to change the world one step at a time - and so can you.

This series of advocacy packets, created by students for students, provides introductory knowledge on these ideas and concepts and walks you through steps on how to begin implementing change in your classroom, home or community. By using our voices and organizing support for these sustainable initiatives, we will change the world.

This specific packet focuses on incorporating intersectional environmentalism in your school or community projects. While this packet serves as a starting point to learn about intersectionality, there is much more to the field as a theory and practice. Use this packet as an entry point into these important issues and find more tools to create intersectional and equitable changes and keep learning!

## DEFINITIONS

**Below are some important definitions for this advocacy packet, please refer back to it as often as you need:**

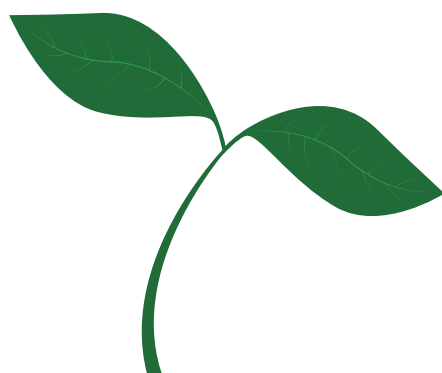
- **Able-Bodied:** Someone who does not have a physical impairment
- **Environmentalism:** Concern about, and action aimed at, protecting the environment
- **Gender Binary:** System of classification that only recognizes two genders, male and female
- **Heteronormativity:** A worldview that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred
- **Heterosexuality:** Being sexually attracted to someone of the opposite sex
- **Injustice:** Unfairness and the violation of rights
- **Intersectionality:** The cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect
- **LGBTQ+:** This acronym is sometimes used as an umbrella term to describe folks who are outside of the traditional heterosexual or gender binary identity
- **Marginalization:** Treatment of a person, group or concept as insignificant or peripheral

## Definitions Continued:

- **Oppression:** When the dominant group uses their power to inflict prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control and builds practices into social systems to maintain this treatment.
- **Systemic Racism:** Policies and practices embedded into established institutions, or practices in society that result in support of, or continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race. It can lead to issues such as discrimination in criminal justice, housing, employment, health care, political power, education, and more.
- **Inclusion:** the degree to which diverse individuals are able to participate fully in the decision-making processes and development opportunities within an organization or group.
- **Settler-Colonialism:** the removal and erasure of Indigenous peoples in order to take control of the land for use by settlers. Persists as long as settlers occupy stolen land.

# WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups”. To move beyond this basic definition, it is important to first understand the roots of intersectionality. Intersectionality is a concept that has been used by Black women since the 1960’s, and was first defined in the academic space by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. In her paper she describes how the oppression experienced by Black women is an intersectional experience where the impacts are “greater than the sum of racism and sexism” alone. The term intersectionality developed to describe the way that both the feminist and the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s and 70s excluded Black women, as they were facing a unique experience due to the overlapping experiences of oppressions. As Black female lesbians, the Combahee River Collective expanded on this work by including the intersection of sexual orientation. These overlapping oppressions are an intersection of oppressions. People can have many overlapping oppressions in their life that create an experience unique to them. Intersectionality aims to be applicable to all people and their different lived experiences.



The idea of intersectionality can be applied to many areas such as feminism, antiracist movements and environmentalism.

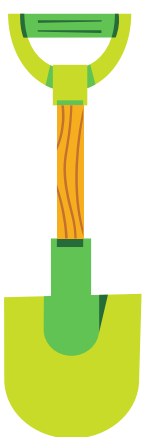
Leah Thomas, the founder of the [website and instagram](#) page “intersectional environmentalist”, describes intersectional environmentalism as “an inclusive version of environmentalism that advocates for both the protection of people and the planet. It identifies the ways in which injustices happening to marginalized communities and the earth are interconnected. It brings injustices done to the most vulnerable communities, and the earth, to the forefront and does not minimize or silence social inequality.”

## IMPORTANCE

Intersectional environmentalism is of the utmost importance to achieve a just and sustainable future. Mainstream environmental movements have historically excluded and continue to exclude many groups of people from activism and decision making. People who are disproportionately impacted by environmental issues, such as climate change, often have several areas of oppression in their lives that intersect and create a uniquely harmful situation. It is important to think about benefiting people as well as the planet when doing environmental work. Making your environmental project intersectional means that you will be able to appeal to and help more people. It also means that your work will be better for the world as a whole.

## REAL LIFE EXAMPLE OF INTERSECTIONAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

One great example of intersectional environmentalism comes from community gardens in low-income areas. There are many communities who do not have access to affordable and healthy foods. It is especially difficult for some communities to obtain fresh and nutritious produce. This is partially due to the fact that many low-income communities and communities of color are located in food apartheid. Food apartheid is generally defined as areas where there is little to no affordable or accessible good-quality and fresh food. Creating a community garden can construct a gathering place that is also a source of fresh and nutritious food. Community gardens challenge systems of racial and economic inequality, making them intersectional.



VISIT [EARTHDAY.ORG](https://www.earthday.org) FOR MORE

# STAKEHOLDERS

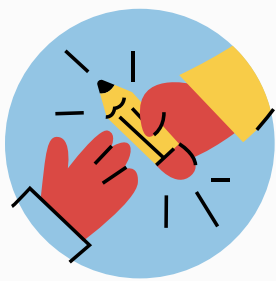
The stakeholders in this situation are anyone who may be involved in your environmental project. You and everyone else in your organization who you can talk to about intersectionality are also stakeholders.



## THE COMMUNITY



The most important stakeholder is the community that you are trying to serve. It is important to keep in mind the overall community you are trying to benefit and how making your environmental work intersectional can help them in a more holistic way. Additionally, there may be a teacher or professor who is spearheading it. These are good people to begin talking with about including intersectionality. Community members can offer their wisdom in incorporating intersectional environmentalism into clubs and organizations. You could reach out to community members to find speakers for your organization or club.



## STUDENTS



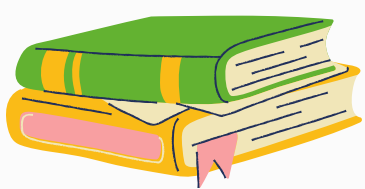
All students at your school who would benefit from learning about, or being a part of intersectional environmentalism.



## CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS



Student environmental clubs or organizations at your school would benefit from learning about intersectional environmentalism and incorporating best practices into their operations. Other types of clubs can get involved in these programs and efforts as well!



## SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS



School administrators are very important to include in your school's intersectional environmentalism efforts. After getting their buy-in, they will be able to help with the implementation of intersectional environmentalism efforts such as finding a speaker to come and talk to school organizations.

# IMPLEMENTATION

- Do a lesson on intersectionality for your group. Check out this [lesson plan](#) from the NAACP.
- Engage with diverse organizations or clubs for collaboration on your topics.
- Practice reflexivity throughout planning - This means taking time to examine your own motives, influences and reactions.
- Assess your projects for focus on whiteness, heteronormativity and/or able-bodiedness. Ask yourself -
  - Is this project inclusive and accessible to all people?
  - Is it beneficial to the community we are aiming to serve?
  - Does my project incorporate diverse worldviews?
  - Is my project participatory?
  - Are we amplifying marginalized or excluded voices?
  - Does this project perpetuate colonialism?
- Invite intersectional environmentalists to speak at your school. Examples of these people could be People of Color who work in the outdoor space or environmental field, environmental feminists, queer environmentalists and people who are working to make the environmental and outdoor industries a more inclusive space for all.
- Send out [an email](#) to environmental clubs or groups at your school encouraging them to be more intersectional.
- [Host a teach-in](#) and educate your community on environmental justice issues.

Additionally, please check out the links below of Earth Day's resources. Consider how your school or club can implement these lessons and events with intersectionality in mind.

[Teach-In Toolkit](#)

[Climate Civics Toolkit](#)

Check out these videos to learn more!

[Access and Inclusivity in the environmental movement](#)

[What is intersectionality and how does it relate to environmentalism](#)

SPECIAL THANKS FOR REVIEWING AND  
CONSULTING ON THIS RESOURCE

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