COOPERATIVE GAME: TOXIC WASTE

You will need a soda can. It will serve as an imaginary container of "toxic waste." Have your group form a circle with participants about a foot apart. Explain that the group goal is to pass the can around the circle without anyone using their hands or dropping the can. Ew! Get rid of it but don't drop it!

When you finish playing any cooperative game, reflect on it as a group to promote healthy group dynamics. Ask questions such as: Was the game fun? Did we achieve our goal? Did everyone try their best? Were all group members kind and helpful to anyone who struggled with the task? How is playing this game like working together on a climate preservation project?

You'll want to be especially sensitive to students who might be hesitant to participate for cultural or socioeconomic reasons:

- Do you have students whose transportation is limited because of lack of auto transport?
- Do you have students who might be reluctant to be involved in local government because of citizenship issues?
- Do you have students who might not be able to get to the beach, the forest, or the wetlands because of handicapping conditions or allergies?
- Do you have students whose parents might be suspicious of their children's participation because of political, cultural, or religious perspectives?
- If you will be fundraising, do you have students who can't participate for financial reasons or because their neighborhoods aren't safe for soliciting?

Encourage students to come forward and try to find work-arounds so that your project is equal opportunity and reflects the entire community. Better yet, be sure that students from marginalized groups have voices in structuring the project. They will design projects that are meaningful to their own communities and doable by community members.

POLISHING THE PLAN

Many student groups have highly energetic starts, then stall. The first few meetings involve great thoughts, great synergy—and then the enormity of the challenge hits the group. What, after all, can we do that could actually make a difference? It all seems too big. The adults we've consulted are too skeptical. The bureaucracy is too thick. Someone tried that before and it didn't work.

To return to the analogy of inertia, those excuses are like friction. Once a group of energetic young people has formed, it's important to "grease the skids" to keep the wheels rolling. A mentor can identify at least one concrete step that can be taken—one with measurable results.

It's important to think about time here. Psychologists talk about people's sense of "fate control"—how far into the future a goal can seem within reach. In general, young people need shorter timelines for results. Changing the CO_2 level in the atmosphere is a huge, decades-long goal. Changing an international treaty or even a state or local law may take years. These are all great goals, but young people need to see shorter-term success to feel empowered. That means a project with real results in real time.

Projects that have worked for other groups include the following:

- Action projects to reduce CO_2 emissions in local, measurable settings. For example:
  - Using less energy in homes, school, or transportation
  - Reducing use of products made from fossil fuels in the community
  - Distributing products that use less energy, such as metal water canteens ("clean canteens"), cloth shopping bags, or CFL or LED lightbulbs
- "Green" projects. For example:
  - Planting green spaces
  - Remodeling roofs or other areas of campus
  - Planting school gardens
  - Getting a fraction of the school's energy from renewable sources
- Education projects focusing on climate change–related topics. For example:
  - How to conserve energy at school through an energy audit
  - The cumulative effects of small actions by individuals
  - The long-term effects of short-term carelessness

- Media projects: podcasts, PowerPoint presentations, or films to change attitudes in the community regarding climate change–related issues. For example:
  - Using native plants to reduce water consumption
  - Consuming local foods to reduce transportation energy
  - Reusing, repairing, and recycling products
  - Eliminating the use of plastic drinking straws by local restaurants
  - Measuring the amount of carbon monoxide in the classroom before and after school buses idle outside the school or lawn crews use noisy weed whackers or leaf blowers
  - Eliminating pollution caused by school buses idling or the use of weed whackers and leaf blowers
  - Stopping the use of Styrofoam lunch trays and other throwaways at the school
  - Biking to school instead of having parents drive