

**Youth Roundtable on the Civilian Climate Corps  
Berggruen Institute  
Future of Democracy Program**



**Table of Contents**

1. [Executive Summary](#)
2. [Key Recommendations](#)
3. [Roundtable Overview](#)
4. [Background: Future of Democracy Program and the Youth Environment Service](#)
5. [Methodology: Sense LA and Creative Assemblies](#)

---

## Executive Summary

---

The Berggruen Institute's Youth Roundtable on the Civilian Climate Corps was a one-day creative assembly held on April 24, 2021 in Los Angeles. It brought together eighteen local participants between the ages of 18 and 26 to consider the structure, aims, and objectives of the Civilian Climate Corps (CCC). Participants were asked to reflect on the key design elements they deem crucial for a CCC equipped to meaningfully address the climate emergency. The event aimed to showcase and model how governments can engage youth in developing climate corps programs, while gaining actionable insight on the types of programming that youth would like to see in the CCC.

Rather than ask participants to consider policy proposals directly, the Roundtable invited them to reflect on the values and priorities that should drive the CCC, and that would incentivize them to consider participation.

The Roundtable was convened by the Berggruen Institute's Future of Democracy Program and Berggruen Fellow Gabriel Kahan, following the format of Kahan's Sense LA creative assemblies.

Over the course of eight hours of conversation and creative engagement, participants identified "**environmental justice**" as the key term that should be foregrounded in conversations regarding the CCC. They subsequently selected six equally weighted factors related to environmental justice that should ground the conversation on the design and implementation of the CCC: 1) **capitalism**; 2) **white supremacy**; 3) **Indigenous sovereignty**; 4) **community activism**; 5) **patriarchy**; and 6) **consumerism**.

Through a discussion of these topics, three key recommendations emerged as collective priorities:

1. **An Intersectional, Environmental Justice Approach**
2. **Community Leadership and Co-Creation**
3. **A Living Wage and Pathways to Employment for Corps Members**

---

## Key Recommendations

---

Three key recommendations crystallized as crucial areas of concern for the participants in the CCC Youth Roundtable: **an intersectional, environmental justice approach** to the CCC; **community leadership and co-creation**; and **a living wage and pathways to employment for Corps members**.



Youth Roundtable on the Civilian Climate Corps  
April 24, 2021  
Marianne Andres Photography

### 1. An Intersectional, Environmental Justice Approach

Participants stressed the importance of recognizing that the climate crisis is intertwined with forms of structural inequity that disproportionately impact communities of color, low-income communities, women, and LGBTQ+ communities.

They advocated for a Civilian Climate Corps actively attuned to environmental racism and intersecting structural inequalities — both in the Corps’s objectives and activities, as well as in its organizational structure.

One participant proposed that the CCC could offer a platform for “**righting the wrongs of environmental racism.**”

Participants offered the following insights regarding the interconnectedness of the climate crisis and forms of structural inequality:

<b>Participant Insights Regarding an Intersectional, Environmental Justice Approach</b>
The CCC's design and activities should recognize and redress the <b>"histories of redlining, gentrification, [and] urban renewal"</b> that explain why there are communities disproportionately impacted by climate change."
On the subject of equity in the CCC's organizational structure, one participant emphasized that the Corps should be run through "a democratic, nonhierarchical structure," with <b>"transparent operations"</b> and reporting methods for harassment."
Organizational equity could be achieved through <b>"overrepresentation of people from under-represented backgrounds"</b> in the CCC.
<b>"BIPOC and LGBTQ+"</b> representation should be prioritized in the CCC hiring and staffing process.
<b>DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)</b> work should be included as "waged," compensated work in the CCC.
The CCC should recognize the role of <b>"systematic disadvantages that white supremacy creates"</b> – through education, through career advancement" in its organizational structure and its programs.
Climate action in disproportionately impacted communities could include "cleaning up <b>communities that have been subjected to toxic waste</b> , places with bad air quality...replacing old pipes that have lead in them and are contaminating water systems that aren't being replaced."
An intersectional approach to climate action and the CCC should involve <b>"building trust with BIPOC communities"</b> given the distrust and broken promises to which BIPOC have been subjected. Restoring those relationships and placing value on the voices of those community members."

## **2. Community Leadership and Co-Creation**

Participants emphasized tremendous concern about the prospect of a CCC that would impose top-down solutions, initiatives, or funding structures on local communities. They stressed that earlier approaches to "community engagement" offered insufficient models for integrating community members' voices in policymaking. In lieu of this, participants urged the *active leadership* of local community members and climate advocates at all stages of designing and implementing CCC programs.

In the same vein, 100% of the Roundtable's exit survey participants indicated that they agreed with the statement:

***"Disproportionately impacted and vulnerable communities should determine the priorities and projects of the Civilian Climate Corps."***

Several participants noted that local communities and community organizations have stepped in to take on the responsibility of meaningful climate action in the face of governmental neglect. One

participant observed that “**when governments and corporations don’t work, communities do.**” Reflecting on the economic and public health crisis catalyzed by the global pandemic, one participant conveyed that “political mobilization has emerged from communities who want to bring about change in the last year...through **mutual aid networks.**”

Defining Community Leadership and Co-Creation
Participants defined community leadership and co-creation as follows:
<i>“Creating CCC grants that help communities on <b>a community-need basis.</b>”</i>
<i>“Making sure that the [CCC’s work] is <b>providing jobs for the communities.</b>”</i>
<i>“Giving the community...<b>a voice in deciding what the CCC does.</b>”</i>
<i>“<b>Knowing the way that [the CCC’s] work affects the community</b>, and the way that [the CCC’s] presence in the community affects community members, educating community members about resources available to them, actively working one-on-one with community members, not rushing through community engagement.”</i>
<i>A “<b>grassroots</b>” approach.</i>
<i>Providing opportunities for community leadership and co-design through “<b>community town hall meetings.</b>”</i>
<i>“Projects <b>co-sponsored by tribal governments,</b>” “opportunities for <b>Indigenous leadership,</b>” “programming that’s funded by the government but is more <b>autonomously run in tribal communities.</b>”</i>
<i>“Incorporating <b>Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous practices</b> into climate adaption, conservation, action.”</i>
<i>Recognize that external actors “coming to a community don’t have the appropriate knowledge base for the work they’re doing” and prioritize “programming that employs people from a community, and <b>centers local knowledge.</b>”</i>
<i>“Honoring grassroots movements” and recognizing and funding the work of community-led climate organizations. “<b>The work is already being done [in communities],</b> it just hasn’t been funded or given the platform it deserves.”</i>
<i>“If the CCC could just <b>come in with funding for people on the ground [in communities],</b> that would be better than an overarching leadership system” or top-down governance approach.</i>
<i>“Not coming into communities thinking, ‘I’m going to fix it and make everything better,’ but <b>coming into communities to listen and to learn.</b>”</i>
<i>“Providing <b>reparations to communities</b> that have borne the brunt of ‘advancements’ that have negatively impacted them” with respect to climate.</i>

On the subject of community engagement, one participant noted, “Individualism is at the core of capitalism and one of the things that the CCC should do is **create bonds between people** and remind them that in the struggle to address climate change, we cannot go it alone.”

Given rising wealth inequality and the disparity in how resources are distributed across specific communities, one participant observed that “**The CCC should help redistribute power and resources [to communities, with communities] making decisions that affect themselves.**”

Participants also emphasized a need to foreground youth voices in the design, implementation, and leadership of the CCC: “**Make sure [young people] have a seat at the table, an actual seat, and [don’t] make them bring the seat, have the seat for them.**” Sustained and ongoing youth engagement also emerged as an area of concern, with one participant urging that “once [the CCC is] created, there should be mechanisms to allow for continued youth input, involvement, governance.”

### 3. A Living Wage and Pathways to Employment for Corps Members

Participants were keenly aware that the economic crisis spurred by the global pandemic will impact their entry into the labor market, as well as their lifetime earning potential. Those participants who are currently involved in climate service reported 1) wages so low that they have to rely on federal food assistance programs; and 2) severely limited employment prospects after the completion of their service term. With this in mind, participants stressed the need to compensate Civilian Climate Corps members with a **living wage**, to provide **guaranteed employment** after the completion of their service term, and to offer **educational awards** that would enable Corps members to complete a degree-granting program after their service term.

Participants involved in a service corps, or who know service corps members, offered the following insights about compensation and economic opportunities:

Participant Insights About CCC Compensation and Economic Opportunities	
Living Wage	<i>“Paying a living wage is 100% the most important part of this. Without a living wage, this program will go nowhere.”</i>
	<i>“Without a living wage, there is no point to a CCC. It will further disenfranchise youth who are already disenfranchised.”</i>
	<i>“Pay people a living wage, pay people above a living wage, pay people well to do this. Then you have people who don’t have to scrounge. <b>I have friends who are in AmeriCorps who are on food stamps.</b>”</i>
	<i>Adequately fund all programming so that the CCC isn’t a “<b>second choice</b>” or an “I can’t get a job so I have to do this,” and feels like a real option.”</i>
Employment Pipeline	<i>“It’s great that you employed these youth for a year, but where are they going to go now?...<b>What’s the career pathway here?</b>”</i>

	<i>Offer “<b>a pipeline into well-paying union jobs.</b>”</i>
	<i>Provide “a guarantee or program that <b>connects [CCC participants] to opportunities</b> after [service].”</i>
<b>Educational Awards</b>	<i><b>Provide “education awards”</b> that aren’t taxed at the recipient’s income level after graduation.</i>
	<i>“Don’t call something an [educational] award [if it’s going to be] taxed as income ...it’s misleading.”</i>

Several participants expressed that the compensation attached to the CCC will also decide who is able to join the Corps, given that low-income prospective applicants may not have the privilege of accepting a position that does not pay a living wage. As one participant put it, “**determining compensation is also determining who has access.**” Another noted that “lack of funding makes it so that **only people with financial privilege or only people working three jobs can participate.**”

Beyond economic compensation, participants also stressed the need for a whole-person approach attuned to the experience of corps members during their term of service with respect to issues including mental health, a culture of community, and resources in place to address issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. One participant proposed that if the CCC decides to employ regional coordinators like its other service corps counterparts, **CCC leadership staff should be “equipped to handle conversations about identity [and] structural racism,”** and should be able to “support fellows.”

For these participants, a living wage and pipeline to employment are crucial if the task is to “**build a new generation of workers who can work on these issues and be paid well.**”

## BREAKDOWN OF PARTICIPANT PRIORITIES FOR THE CIVILIAN CLIMATE CORPS



### EXIT SURVEY DATA

*Data Collected from Exit Surveys Distributed to Participants in the Berggruen Institute's Youth Roundtable on the Civilian Climate Corps*

Participants were asked to rate the importance of each of these elements in the design, implementation, and structure of the Civilian Climate Corps.



---

## Roundtable Overview

---

The Youth Roundtable on the Civilian Climate Corps was organized through the following activities:

### I. Introductory Exercise

In the introduction to the event, participants each shared two issues of personal concern to them, one related to their individual experience and one related to their community.

### II. Group Discussion

The collective discussion that followed mapped the connectedness of these concerns, and traced the relationship between these concerns and the climate crisis. At the conclusion of the conversation, participants collectively determined that the umbrella term that would 1) encapsulate all of these concerns, and 2) be most relevant to recommendations for the CCC was **environmental justice**.



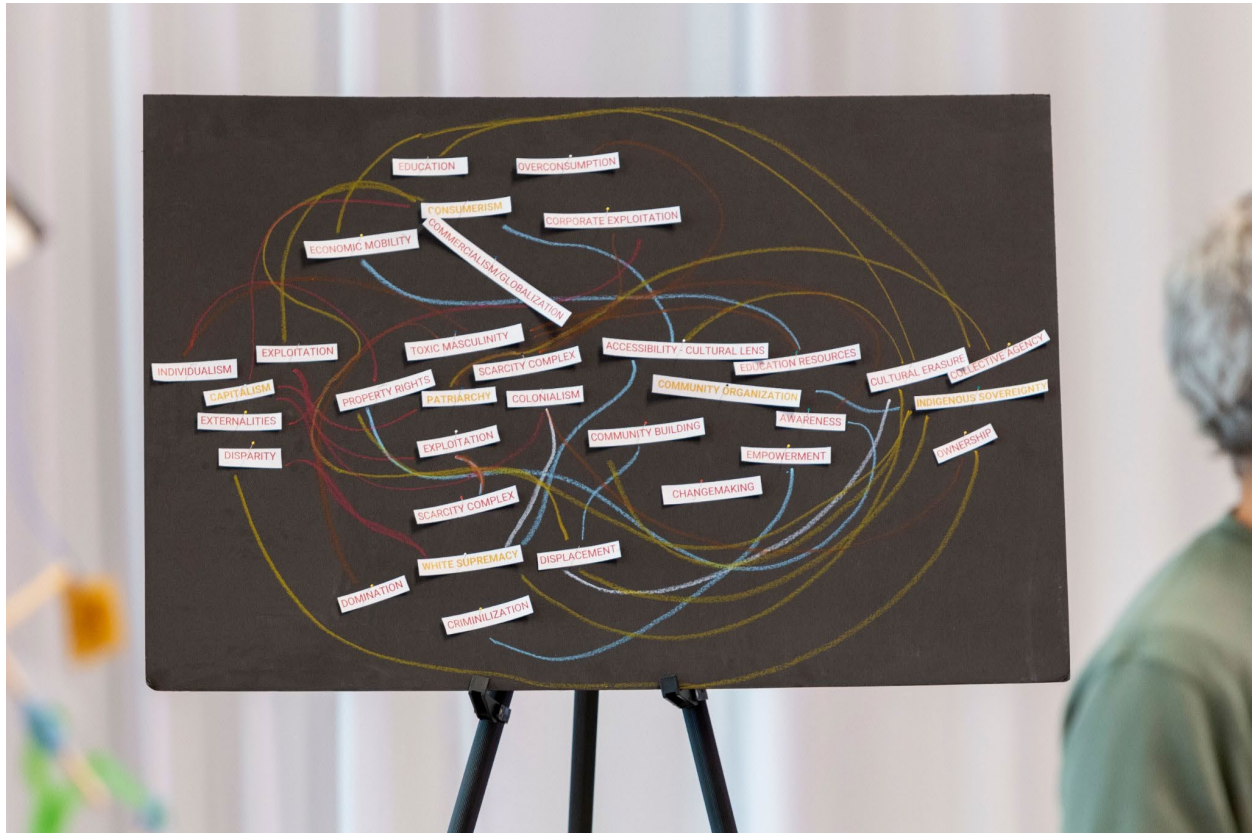
Youth Roundtable on the Civilian Climate Corps  
April 24, 2021  
Marianne Andres Photography

Participants subsequently identified six terms that represent the core factors to consider in relation to environmental justice, namely:

- **Capitalism**
- **White Supremacy**
- **Indigenous Sovereignty**
- **Community Activism**
- **Patriarchy**
- **Consumerism**

### III. System Map Making

Following the group discussion, participants broke up into six groups, each devoted to the discussion of one of the six key terms selected in the previous exercise.



Youth Roundtable on the Civilian Climate Corps  
April 24, 2021  
Marianne Andres Photography

Through **PREPARE methodology** (the peer-evaluation process developed by Kahan and MIT mechanical engineering professor Alexander Slocum), each group collaborated to map the systems of cause-and-effect that undergird the concept they chose.

### IV. Visualization Process and Presentation

Following the systems mapping exercise, participants collaborated to visualize the key terms their group selected in three-dimensional sculptural objects. Each of the six groups' visuals was affixed to a sculptural cube installed in the center of the space, representing both a "collective brain" and the material outcome of collaborative thought and deliberation.



Youth Roundtable on the Civilian Climate Corps  
April 24, 2021  
Marianne Andres Photography

---

## **Background: Future of Democracy Program and the Youth Environment Service**

---

The Civilian Climate Corps Youth Roundtable builds on a year of research, publication, and convenings organized by the Berggruen Institute's Future of Democracy program. The program's work in this field was dually focused on 1) establishing a **Youth Environment Service (YES)**; and 2) **developing participatory processes for youth engagement**.

This research originates from the Future of Democracy's reform plan published in 2019, "**Renewing Democracy in the Digital Age**." This plan was developed by a broad range of democratic practitioners and reform theorists, and driven by Martin Moore, Director of the Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power at King's College London. A cornerstone of the plan was YES: the Youth Environment Service.

Prior to the release of President Biden's January 27th Executive Order announcing the creation of the CCC, the Berggruen Institute published a policy brief advocating for the establishment of YES. The brief defined YES as a program that would:

*provide opportunities for young people to work together across differences to protect the planet from climate catastrophe while furthering their democratic leadership, job skills, and capacity for common purpose.*

—“Youth Environment Service (YES) Policy Brief”  
Future of Democracy Program, Berggruen Institute

The YES program was designed to address three primary objectives: 1) **environmental goals** (to slow climate change and reverse mass extinctions); 2) **economic goals** (to develop job skills, particularly for youth populations disproportionately impacted by the economic effects of COVID-19, and to advance sustainable development); and 3) **social goals** (to promote the democratic integration of youth from diverse communities and build solidarity by working toward a common cause).

After the January 27th announcement of the CCC, the Future of Democracy program drew from its ongoing research and discussions on YES to publish a series of recommendations entitled “**Youth-Led Climate Action: Strategic Recommendations for the Civilian Climate Corps.**”

The publication outlines three key recommendations for the CCC:

1. Youth should serve as core participants and co-designers of the CCC;
2. The CCC should focus on building transnational coalitions; and
3. The scale of the CCC should be calibrated to the massive scale of the problem that faces us through a jobs program.

Building on this publication, the Future of Democracy program will spend 2021 developing participatory processes for youth engagement, and creating platforms for young people to provide insights regarding the Corps. The CCC Youth Roundtable held on April 24th was the first of these convenings, and additional events will be organized across the country in the months to come.



Youth Roundtable on the Civilian Climate Corps  
April 24, 2021  
Marianne Andres Photography

---

## Methodology: Sense LA and Creative Assemblies

---

The CCC Youth Roundtable was organized as a creative assembly led by Berggruen Fellow Gabriel Kahan using the framework of his Sense LA PREPARE methodology.

**Sense LA** is a program at the Berggruen Institute designed by Kahan to creatively harness the power of collective-intelligence through public participation, to build social cohesion, and to foster dialogue for the betterment of cities and their communities. It is a work of socially engaged art that aims to create an urban collective-intelligence resource to help people from all backgrounds and abilities to have a voice in their community, understand their city, guide multi-pronged decision making, and cultivate shared perspectives.

Sense LA accomplishes this by organizing gatherings called **creative assemblies**, drawing on individual experience to facilitate in-depth explorations of local issues and their interdependencies. The methodology utilized in these assemblies enables individuals within the community to identify and address problems of mutual interest and creatively visualize them in ways that facilitate new forms of understanding the intertwined and evolving relationship between individual and collective. The

program's methodology, called **PREPARE**, was created by Kahan and mechanical engineering professor Alexander Slocum at MIT.



Youth Roundtable on the Civilian Climate Corps  
April 24, 2021  
Marianne Andres Photography

The eighteen participants in the CCC Youth Roundtable represent a self-selected sampling of young people residing in Southern California, several of whom are current service members with organizations like the Long Beach Conservation Corps.

Outreach for the Roundtable was conducted through calls for participation distributed to:

- **colleges and universities** — including **Cal State LA, Long Beach City College, USC, UCLA, Pomona College, El Camino College, and UC Davis;**
- **climate action organizations** — including **Youth Climate Strike LA, Sunrise Movement, CALPIRG, and Extinction Rebellion LA;**
- **climate and conservations corps** — including the **Long Beach Conservation Corps, the California Climate Corps, and the Los Angeles Conservation Corps;** and
- **BIPOC-led (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-led) organizations** — including the **International Indigenous Youth Council, the Fresno City College Native American Inter-Tribal Student Association, the UCLA Environmentalists of Color Collective Initiative, and the Indigenous Environmental Network.**

Prior to the event, all participants received a briefing packet including the following informational resources:

### Texts

- Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, Sec. 215.
- [“Youth-Led Climate Action: Strategic Recommendations for the Civilian Climate Corps”](#) (Berggruen Institute)
- [“Here's What A Civilian Climate Corps Could Look Like”](#) (Huffington Post)
- Intersectional Environmentalist Council, [“Letter to President Biden”](#)
- Slideshow: [Introduction to AmeriCorps](#)
- [“12 ways the arts can encourage climate action”](#) (Guardian)
- [“7 Trends for a Creative Climate Movement”](#) (Julie's Bicycle)

### Social Media Accounts

- Sunrise Movement: [@sunrisemvmt](#)
- Zero Hour: [@ThisIsZeroHour](#)
- International Student Environmental Coalition: [@isecoalition](#)
- Mock COP26: [@MockCOP26](#)
- Fridays for Future: [@Fridays4future](#)
- Indigenous Environment Network: [@ienearth](#)
- Intersectional Environmentalist: [@isxenviro](#)

### Videos

- [YES – Youth Environment Service](#) (Berggruen Institute)
- [“Mock COP26”](#) (France 24)
- [War on the EPA](#) (PBS Frontline)

Participants were also asked to consider the following questions in advance of the event:

1. *How have you been impacted by the climate emergency, and/or how do you see the climate emergency impacting you in the future?*
2. *What does climate action mean to you?*
3. *Do you feel you have a voice in the climate fight, and that there are opportunities for you to meaningfully intervene in climate action?*