

Building Political Power to Protect Michigan's Land, Air and Water

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Executive Summary

The Michigan League of Conservation Voters (MLCV) is a nonpartisan organization working to build a conservation majority in Michigan to protect the state's natural resources and public health. This University of Michigan Graham Sustainability Scholars team worked in collaboration with MLCV to better understand student perception of and engagement in sustainability and environmental issues. To achieve this goal, three focus groups were organized to collect feedback on questions related to civic engagement in Michigan. All 14 participants in the focus groups were students currently enrolled at a University of Michigan campus who were Michigan residents between the ages of 17 and 26.

To organize the focus groups, the scholars team developed a script and carefully crafted questions in collaboration with the client. To publicize participation in these groups, we drafted a project announcement and emailed it to various organizations on all three University of Michigan campuses. We also made posts on several Facebook groups that were designated for University of Michigan students. Focus groups were hosted and recorded virtually through Zoom.

As a result of these focus groups, five main themes were identified. These themes include:

- The perception that water issues are currently the biggest environmental issue in Michigan
- A lack of accessibility and awareness creating barriers for students to engage in environmental issues
- The existence of barriers for students that might be removed by improved communication methods and provision of sustainability resources
- Students are encouraged by personal benefits, seeing their individual impact, and the effects of institutional change
- The popularity of social media platforms, especially Instagram and Twitter, as resources for students to obtain information on current environmental and sustainability issues.

To improve communication and engagement with this key group of voters, the scholars team recommends that MLCV:

- Increase the visibility of water-related issues by creating an engagement resource that provides information on current issues, ways to engage, and how to make an impact.
- Increase accessibility and awareness of key issues by offering smaller time commitments for volunteers and hosting virtual events
- Incorporate motivations for student engagement by emphasizing strength in numbers through the use of a website ticker for petitions
- Host additional focus groups to gain input from absent or underrepresented demographics as well as address the disconnect between the perceived, biggest environmental issue and actual student engagement.

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Introduction & Background

The Michigan League of Conservation Voters (MLCV) is a nonpartisan organization working to find common ground on various, important issues regarding Michigan's natural resources. Their priorities are safe drinking water for all, healthy Great Lakes, good government with open and fair elections, clean air, addressing climate change, and preserving, protecting and investing in parks and public land. MLCV is working hard to build a conservation majority in Michigan to protect the state's land, air and water political priorities. They are educating and engaging business leaders, residents, and elected officials to take action on pressing issues facing this state.

MLCV would like to increase engagement with Michigan residents between the ages of 17-26. MLCV is interested in learning more about this group's sources of information and interest in engaging in conservation efforts. To help improve MLCV's communication and engagement with this intended group, a University of Michigan Graham Sustainability Scholars team organized focus groups to gain insight on student perceptions and engagement in environmental and sustainability issues.

Methods

The scholars team researched best practices and techniques for focus groups and developed a script to be used in all three sessions. The polls and open-ended questions included in the script were drafted in collaboration with the client and edited to achieve appropriate wording to address MLCV's goals. The full script that was used during each focus group can be found in Appendix C. We publicized calls for participants by emailing announcements to different campus organizations at all three University of Michigan campuses. The scholars team also made several posts in Facebook groups designated for University of Michigan students. Three focus groups were held between January 26th, 2021 and January 29th, 2021. Focus groups were hosted and recorded virtually through Zoom with auto-transcription enabled. They lasted an average of 40 minutes. Each participant received a \$20 Amazon e-gift card upon completion of the groups. Funds for these incentives were provided equally by MLCV and a Social and Environmental Sustainability Grant from the Student Sustainability Coalition.

Upon completion of the focus groups, each transcript was checked for accuracy and all data was compiled into a single spreadsheet to be analyzed. Data for responses to each poll and question posed during the focus groups was sorted by participant. Then, responses were analyzed by question to identify common themes, and by responses as a whole across all questions posed to identify overarching themes. Quotes containing identified themes from participant responses were compiled into groups and included in Appendix A of this report.

Results

Focus Group Attendance

39 people expressed interest in participating in one of these three focus groups. Six people did not meet the necessary qualifications to participate (i.e. a Michigan resident between the ages of 17 and 26 years old), so a total of 33 Zoom registration invites were sent to the remaining respondents. Of the 33 respondents who received invitations, 21 registered for a focus group and 14 attended. The majority of participants (78.6%) were from University of Michigan Ann Arbor, with the rest attending the Dearborn campus. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 23. When

asked if they were engaged with environmental issues, 42.6% responded “Yes” while 35.7% answered “No” and 21.4% answered “Not currently”. Although about one third of participants reported having no engagement in environmental issues, only one participant selected “None of the above” when identifying environmental activities they have completed. These results implied inconsistency in how the term “environmental engagement” was perceived by respondents.

Major Themes

Several themes were prevalent in participant responses for certain questions and for the focus groups overall. An extensive collection of key comments pertaining to these themes can be found in Appendix A. The main themes identified were:

- Water related environmental issues are the biggest issues in Michigan
- Lack of accessibility and awareness are barriers to engaging with environmental issues
- Barriers potentially can be removed by improved communication and provision sustainability resources
- People are encouraged to engage by personal benefits, seeing their direct impact, and institutional change
- Social media platforms are a popular resource for students to access information regarding environmental and sustainable issues

The environmental issue that was perceived to be the biggest concern in Michigan right now is related to water. Water related responses came up a total of nine times across all three focus groups, including concerns about water pollution, protecting waterways, and accessibility of clean drinking water. However, it should be noted that none of the participants reported engagement in any water-related activities. In fact, the most common environmental activities were reducing the use of single-use plastics and signing online petitions, including advocacy for nuclear power plants in future green energy grids. A common recurrence among participant responses were interests in activities that could be incorporated as lifestyle changes or required a small time commitment to complete. A bar chart representing all participant responses for the opening poll is shown in Figure B.1 in Appendix B. Outside of environmental concerns, participants had interests in human rights, healthcare and education.

Participants cited accessibility/cost and lack of awareness regarding both what relevant environmental issues exist and actions that should be taken to solve environmental problems as barriers to engaging in environmental activities. Cost related responses came up four unique times across all of the focus groups, but the majority of participants verbally agreed or physically nodded when cost was being discussed. Insufficient education or lack of awareness about environmental issues were mentioned as barriers three times, as multiple participants mentioned the bulk of their sustainability knowledge was a result of their education at the University of Michigan. Outside of the University, they did not have access to the same resources or knowledge base. An additional minor theme was the feeling of being overwhelmed with the amount of information and choices available related to sustainability decisions. One participant noted they were confused about determining the best environmentally conscious options when purchasing products, such as dairy or almond milk, due to conflicting information. A key comment expressing some of these themes is listed below:

- “It kind of comes down to where you live, your accessibility to those sustainable practices, income and extra income in order to do that first step towards making the

sustainable practices. Maybe you don't have an extra dollar to spend on a reusable grocery bag. And maybe you don't have access to knowledge on these issues or aren't even aware of it, because your group of friends might not talk about it a lot or your relatives aren't really concerned about that.”

When asked about what would make it easier for them and others to engage, the majority of responses were related to the barriers mentioned earlier in this report. Several participants reported that publicizing and communicating information about various issues would be helpful, such as what recycling centers can actually process. One participant stated that engaging with people in person was an effective way to increase awareness, and two participants mentioned that seeing signs around their city or on buses would remind them to make sustainable choices. Free sustainability related items were also discussed as a way to make sustainability more accessible to lower income students and families. Possible sustainability items discussed in the focus groups were cotton mesh bags to put produce in at the grocery store, glass or plastic tupperware and reusable grocery bags. Three participants also mentioned that integrating sustainability topics into all majors or having a required environmental class at college would raise awareness. Key comments for these themes include:

- “So last semester, I was on campus for a few months and the dining halls gave out reusable bags, which I saw people carrying everywhere, so I guess receiving sustainability related items and supplies can really go a long way.”
- “I think being constantly reminded of it would be helpful, like what comes to mind is like, if I walk around campus and I see posters of being environmentally friendly I feel like that would just stay in the back of my mind, a little bit more.”

When discussing factors that encourage people to engage in sustainability issues, participants cited personal benefits, feeling their actions have a direct impact on the world and seeing large institutional change as motivation. Personal benefits such as health benefits from eating vegetarian or financial benefits were discussed heavily in the first focus group as secondary gains that result from making environmentally conscious choices. Multiple participants who engaged in phone banking or calling legislators cited frustration with feeling like they were not making an impact and preferred other methods such as signing petitions because more people were involved and they felt ‘strength in numbers’. Two participants mentioned that seeing sustainability plans or actions from big companies inspired them to make personal changes because they knew they were not alone in trying to make environmentally conscious decisions. Key comments expressing these themes include:

- “When you do something that benefits you or benefits the environment, maybe a primary gain of [making more food at home and buying less food prepackaged] is that you feel good about having helped the environment. In my own example, a secondary gain may have been, say the health benefits of cooking more at home.”
- “With the government sometimes [it] can feel like you’ve run into a brick wall, so even if [calling legislators] does mean something, I feel like it's not super big unless you get a whole group of constituents calling... when you have like thousands of people signing petitions, and you've got that strength in numbers... I feel like I've accomplished something more.”

Participants reported utilizing social media as their primary resource for environmental news and information. Social media platforms reported were Instagram (mentioned seven times), Twitter

(mentioned four times), and Reddit (mentioned one time). When using social media, participants reported following environmental related accounts and seeing environmental information on their friends' feeds as how they were exposed to environmental issues. One participant reported using nonpartisan voter websites as a resource they utilized, and three discussed going straight to news outlets such as New York Times or Washington Post for information. Another participant mentioned using Google as a resource to research eco-friendly products and shared that this affected the ads she was shown on her social media accounts, increasing her exposure to environmental and sustainable information.

Upon completion of the focus groups, ten participants reported having learned something new, three had their perspectives on a subject changed, and ten were more likely to engage in environmental and sustainability issues in the future. A bar chart representing the complete responses of all participants is shown in Figure B.2 in Appendix B.

Recommendations

Increase Visibility of Water-related Issues

Although water issues were perceived as the biggest environmental issue in Michigan right now, none of the focus group participants mentioned any engagement related to these issues. Identified interests and barriers could also be used to create a student engagement resource to provide students with information on issues in Michigan, ways they can engage in those issues, and how to start making an impact. Information regarding how to best engage in personal practices that will help Michigan waterways should be publicized to decrease the disconnect noted in the focus groups.

Increase Accessibility and Awareness

Hosting events virtually could be one way to address the barrier to accessibility that was identified by students in the focus groups. This format enables participants to engage to various degrees, depending on their comfort level: participants can share their responses verbally with their video on; others can type in the chat; anyone not comfortable being on video can have it disabled; and, those who are comfortable can speak with live video. In all of these situations, the responses of the participants are gathered while allowing everyone to remain comfortable with their method of engagement. Virtual meetings could be a great tool for MLCV to engage more individuals in sustainability and environmental issues; however, due to the increased use of virtual platforms at this time, many students may be experiencing Zoom fatigue. A hybrid focus group/webinar could be a great alternative to provide students a break with traditional webinar or lecture style presentation. This method could provide an opportunity to gather input from participants on a topic while also providing environmental education information.

The scholars team also recommends that time should be considered as an accessibility barrier for student volunteers. Perhaps MLCV could consider smaller time commitments for volunteers that would enable students to engage more on these important issues. This could include making a few calls in between classes or offering half hour time slots for community cleanups.

Incorporate Motivations for Student Engagement

To create messaging that resonates with Michigan residents between the ages of 17-26, the scholars team recommends that MLCV should develop messaging that incorporates the motivations that encourage students to engage as well as relate environmental and sustainability issues into other important issues currently present in Michigan. This messaging could be tested on future focus groups to determine what resonates most with students. MLCV should also use social media platforms, specifically Instagram and Twitter, to disseminate information in order to reach the 17-26 age demographic.

To emphasize the importance of individual action and strength in numbers, this team recommends that MLCV utilizes a website ticker that tracks the number of people who have signed petitions or viewed pages on environmental engagement topics. This ticker tool could also be utilized to track the number of people who have pledged to call legislators about certain issues. Through use of a ticker, visibility of the number of people engaging on the same issues would be increased and it would help build a sense of community.

Host Additional Focus Groups

Due to the limited racial and regional diversity of our focus group participants, the scholars team recommends that MLCV should host additional focus groups in the future. To gain a better understanding of the perceptions and engagement of the intended group, input should be received from a larger pool of participants who are representative of the complete demographic of Michigan. The focus groups conducted by the scholars team had several demographics absent or underrepresented, including people identifying as male, age 21 and older, Northern Michigan residents, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

The focus group script is a great resource that MLCV could utilize to host future focus groups. Additional information could be gathered, specifically to address demographic areas that were absent or underrepresented in the original groups conducted as well as identify reasons for the disconnect between what students perceive to be the biggest environmental issue in Michigan and the issues students actually engage in. Future focus groups should ask additional questions to address this disconnect.

Anticipated Impacts

As a result of this project and the obtained data, this Graham Scholars team anticipates the following impacts:

- Improved communication and engagement of MLCV with Michigan residents between the ages of 17 and 26.
- Insight on best messaging practices to utilize when communicating and engaging with this demographic.
- A usable framework for future focus groups that can be used to gain input from absent or underrepresented demographics as well as address other environmental topics, including the disconnect between what students perceive to be the biggest environmental issue in Michigan and what issues students are actually engaging in.

Appendix

Appendix A: Compilation of Quotes by Theme

Appendix B: Poll Data

Appendix C: Focus Group Script

Appendix D: Subteam 2, Summary Report

Appendix A: Compilation of Quotes by Theme

Biggest Environmental Issue in Michigan Key Quotes:

- “Road runoff, especially into water sources.”
- “I think it'd be beneficial if people were informed about either getting filters or using tap water in more sustainable ways.”
- “I'm from the Flint area so very familiar with the water crisis it affected my high school and a lot of my classmates pretty significantly. I think that's definitely a big issue and more localized but I have friends that live over on the West side of the state and Northern Michigan that have commented on the quality of water in their own areas. I think that Flint kind of got the spotlight for a while on that and even in Benton Harbor Michigan they also have got water problems, and so I was thinking the same thing. I think that people kind of just throw water bottles at the problem and call it good.”
- “I think one of the biggest problems is just protecting waterways, in general, so like, especially in Michigan since we have like the Great Lakes and a bunch of other water bodies as well.”
- “Essentially, I've been thinking a lot about the line five pipeline and all that stuff and how that correlates to pollution and water quality and everything that goes with that stuff but with all the news going out with that it's definitely been in the forefront of my mind.”

Barriers to Engagement Key Quotes:

- “I think part of it comes down to like accessibility to either being able to do it, based on what resources they have. So reducing single use plastics isn't always possible because maybe you live in a lower income area where, for example, your only grocery store is a dollar store. And so your single use plastics are most of what you have to buy in order to survive, so it kind of comes down to where you live, your accessibility to those sustainable practices, income and extra income in order to do that first step towards making the sustainable practices. Maybe you don't have an extra dollar to spend on a reusable grocery bag. And maybe you don't have access to knowledge on these issues or aren't even aware of it, because your group of friends might not talk about it a lot or your relatives aren't really concerned about that.”
- “Specifically for me with the example of like reaching out to legislators and stuff, I guess I just like I don't know how or like even how to, I guess I could just look up like how to reach out to legislators, but I've just like never really done it before and none of my friends or anyone that I know of has done it before so it's like um, I guess it's not on my mind a lot just cause I don't know how.”
- “Access to information, because I feel like a lot of the sustainability and knowledge that I've gotten has been through like this college or just overall, just like looking up online um, what sustainability is and like what it means in terms of like, different industries and stuff. So if you don't have the time or access to the internet or even just [don't] know how to look things up um, and get the information you want, then it might be hard to like access a lot of sustainability things.”
- “I feel like it can be overwhelming too. Like all these things that people say that you should do that are better for the environment, and sometimes it's like you don't even know which one is better. I think for example, one thing for me is I don't drink like regular milk and dairy, but then it's also there's an argument that “oh, almond milk isn't

even that good for the environment” or soy milk, or like which one is even the best like versus oat milk and stuff like that. So there's, sometimes there's maybe overwhelming like how many options or what exactly is good for the environment.”

- “It's also like a feeling of not having a personal impact, like it's easy to think as one person like ‘Okay, if I stop eating meat, like okay, so what? It’s not like the world is gonna be saved.’”
- “Like, I know I go to the grocery store and I want to buy like a bunch of cilantro. I can't just put it in my, you know, put it in the shopping cart. I have to use a single use, um, plastic bags, which I don't know what other way there is to kind of minimize that because if I’ve taken my own containers, then like I just have to stack my, you know, cart with so many containers, and that's just not feasible. So, I think this lack of ability to change is something that affects that too.”
- “Cost, outright. Being sustainable is really expensive and even when I try to be more sustainable, I can't always budget in for the month the more sustainable products and I can't justify it to myself. College is expensive, life is expensive and it's also the feedback I get from a lot of people that I work with. Up in Flint where I’m from, it's not on the top of people’s lists to buy the more sustainable products because it's not cost effective for them. That is a huge barrier to it.”

Ways to Break Down Barriers:

- “So last semester, I was on campus for a few months and the dining halls gave out reusable bags, which I saw people carrying everywhere, so I guess receiving sustainability related items and supplies can really go a long way.”
- “Having starter sustainability kits and ways that you can be more sustainable in your everyday life without having to spend a bunch of money to replace everything that you own. Or ways and places that you can shop that allow you to have a more sustainable lifestyle because it's less plastic and more glass... bringing your own jar and fill it up, type of practices. Or information on how to get in contact with your legislators, current issues that are needing help and pushing from the public. But it's information, it's that spread of information and getting it out on that one to one basis, or standing there talking to someone or giving them that information that they can take and look at and be like ‘Oh, this is important enough that someone made like an entire pamphlet that I'm looking at.’”
- “I was just gonna say like making sure that your sustainable initiatives are kind of tailored to the community and making it accessible for a lot of people and making sure that you're not putting a white sustainability label on it, where it's like you don't have to buy the best glass jar for your water or anything like that you can use what you already have. I guess, just meeting the community where they're at and understanding what their challenges or their most prevalent issues are is important with that.”
- “I think it's important to make environmentalism more of a personal issue that people pay attention to. And then also something is kind of specific that came to my mind is that, like I don't know exactly what it is, but I read that a lot of recycling doesn't actually make it to recycling because it doesn't pass the standards for what can be recycled. And it's like I don't know if I've ever gotten very clear information about what my recycling Center can recycle and cannot, so I think that will make a difference, at the very least.”

- “I think they should give college students some kind of incentive. Like rewards or something for recycling.”
- “This sort of goes along with what someone said earlier, but in addition to like bringing attention to the positives of being more sustainable is also like pointing out things where, like yes, it might just be one fork and it might just be that but how much that adds up. Like if every time I got on the bus and it said, ‘Oh, by the way, by taking this you're releasing this much’ and then I'd be like ‘Oh, I could probably walk there.’ If I constantly had the negative tone of my choices thrown at my face as well as the good. Maybe I don't know, if posters were meaner to me I'd pay more attention.”
- “I think being constantly reminded of it would be helpful, like what comes to mind is like, if I walk around campus and I see posters of being environmentally friendly I feel like that would just stay in the back of my mind, a little bit more.”
- “I feel like each major and discipline should have some sort of environmental class or focus that goes along with it because I feel like it's applicable to everything in a society: business, engineering, computer science, political science anything like that so just making it more of a topic conversation in school and in college, I think, really raise awareness.”

Motivation for Engagement Key Quotes:

- “One thing we talk a lot about in our psychology classes is the concept of secondary gain, so when you do something that benefits you or benefits the environment, maybe a primary gain of that is that you feel good about having helped the environment. In my own example, a secondary gain may have been, say the health benefits of cooking more at home.”
- “I think I'd say that probably the most impactful way to engage is just to do these things yourself and even beyond leading by example large scale behavior change across society is just going to be a lot of individuals deciding to do it, so when it comes down to it, I think the individual deciding to change their behavior and engage in these initiatives is more impactful than really anything else.”
- “With the government sometimes [it] can feel like you've run into a brick wall, so even if [calling legislators] does mean something I feel like it's not super big unless you like get like a whole group of constituents calling because, like your vote does matter, but one vote: it doesn't really. So, like that's really frustrating, but when like you have like thousands of people signing petitions, and you've got that strength in numbers, like at least personally to me, it feels like it's more effective, and I feel like I've accomplished something more.”
- “I have a hard time like writing letters, or like signing things just cause I feel like I never see anything happen, and it just makes me kind of sad. And then it's like, I mean it takes five minutes, so like you know it's not that big of a deal. Um, and even like sharing things on like Instagram or whatever sometimes feels like I'm being like annoying or like telling people how to live their lives, and I don't like to do that. Um, so I guess like just doing like cleanups and stuff is the most like obvious... you can see the change.”
- “I find it really motivating when larger companies put out their plans, because it's very easy to get defeated when I'm like ‘Oh I'm trying to take shorter showers but what's that going to do? I know the person next to me isn't.’ So it can be really easy to be defeated when you do like the small personal efforts. They are still important, but especially when

you see big news about big companies that are really making a change I feel like that's more motivating in a lot of ways.”

- “I think sometimes it can be like defeating when you feel like you're the only one doing your part to help the environment...sometimes when I visit like the Disney store at the mall...whenever I buy something from there they don't offer you a bag anymore, you have to either pay for a reusable bag, or you just carry it out the store, so I think when you see companies doing that it reminds you like - hey there's a problem, the environment, and there are people who are trying to fix it and you should probably be doing your part too.”

Accessible Resources Key Quotes:

- “Since most of my engagement is changing, what I do rather than reaching out or protesting or anything like that I go to reddit a lot and see what other people are doing on and off of that.”
- Typed in chat: Nonpartisan voter website where I can read about issues on ballots, but I use social media to learn about current issues and then finding outside sources. My mom does a lot of sustainable practices and that has influenced me a lot.
- “I use Twitter a lot mostly so I can like see where things are coming from that my friends talk about because sometimes I feel like people our age, at least just my small sample size of friends will like to get the news from Twitter, which is all fine and dandy but then they don't look any further than the tweet and it's not always accurate information. I think Twitter lends itself to us and has a bit more accuracy than Instagram because it was used so often by the former presidential administration, whether that is good or bad. So I think that more and more credible sources and news outlets saw that I guess Twitter is like the preferred method of communication now so they started all using it too. Which is good and bad, but also, there are some like not very credible sources on Twitter and I have friends that just kind of use that as their only source and it's not all accurate.”
- “I definitely think Instagram’s probably easiest but I know there's been a bunch of cases like I'll see stuff that's like, “Oh post this on your story will donate a tree” or something like that, and then it ends up being like a scam and I know not all of them are but, like some of them have zero followers to start it and then you know it's most likely maybe not the best. So for social media I sometimes go on Twitter. It's probably not the best choice, but I feel like I can at least better follow news reports and more credible sources. And sometimes instagram, and then I mean what the best would definitely be like straight news outlets. I read probably the Washington Post the most but it's not like they're specifically sustainability based. I have their app on my phone.”
- “I think just googling honestly. Like you know I didn't even know metal straws were a thing until I stumbled upon it on Amazon, and I was like “Oh, this is really cool.” And I just got one and it kinda like changed my life, you know. So just googling replacement items around the house that you can use.”
- “Yeah, so I think social media has a huge impact because things blow up really quickly and get a lot of people's attention, especially with certain topics that maybe people weren't aware of before. I mainly use Instagram. Yeah so a good place to go is the explore page and also on my friend stories, I see a lot of posts being re-shared.”

Appendix B: Poll Data

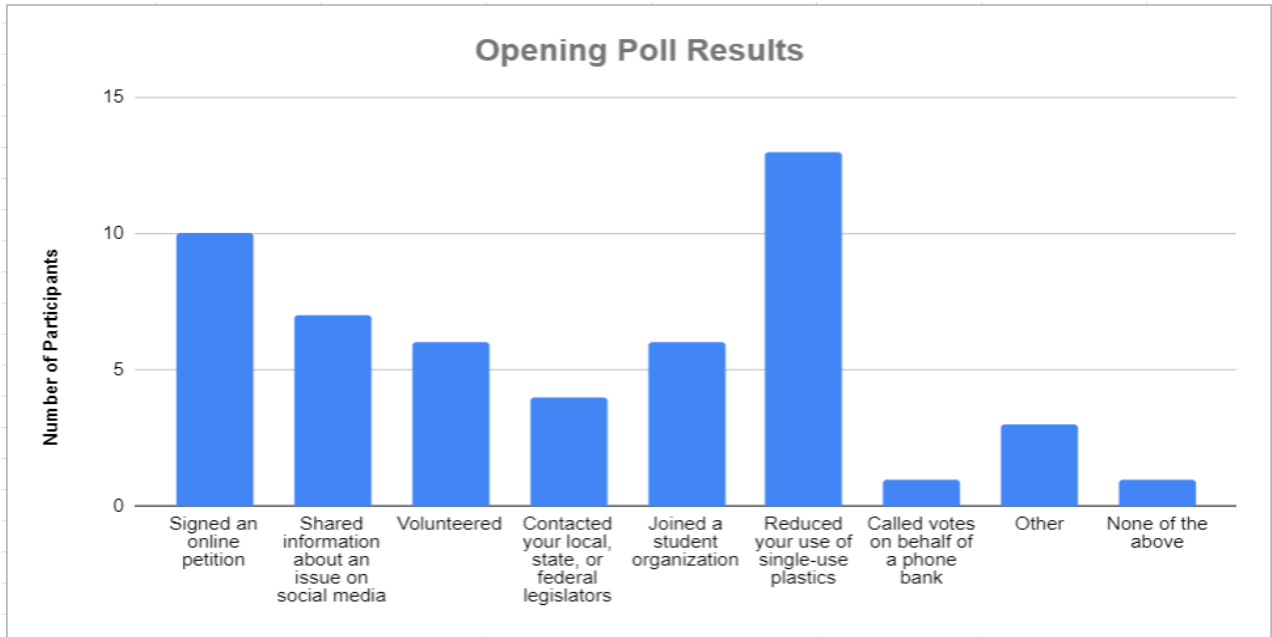


Figure B.1: A bar chart representing the responses received from all 14 participants during the opening poll regarding engagement in environmental and sustainable issues. The most popular activities reported by participants were reducing their use of single-use plastic and signing online petitions. Only one participant reported having been involved in a phone bank, and only one participant reported having no engagement in any environmental or sustainability related activities.

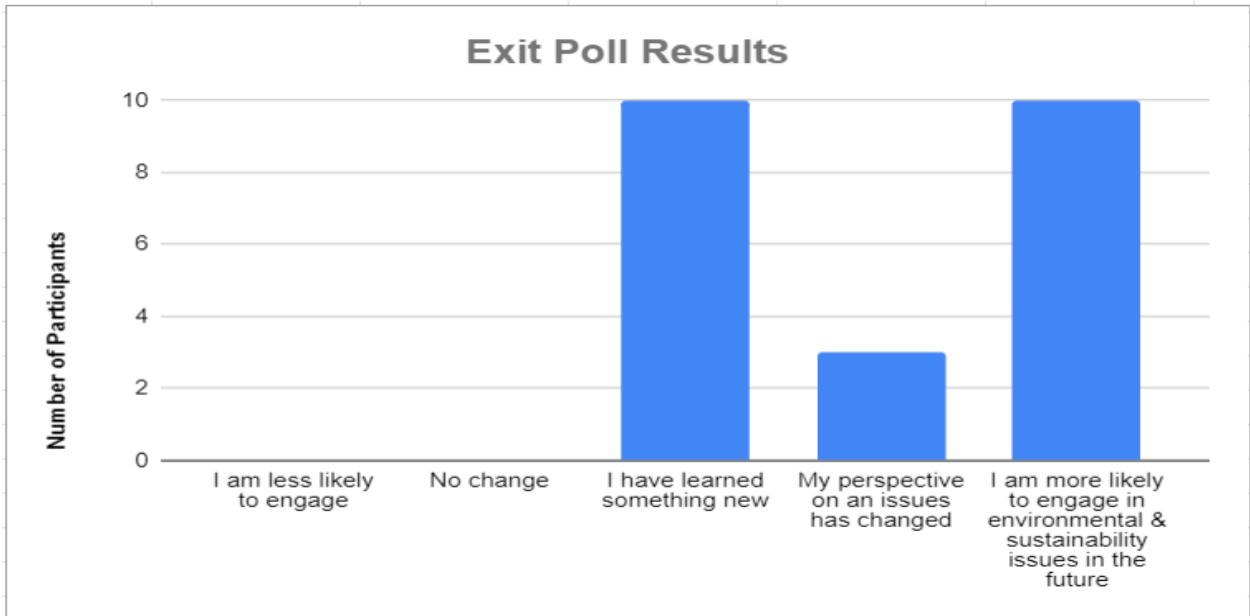


Figure B.2: A bar chart representing the responses received from all 14 participants during the exit poll. The most common responses were having learned something new and being more likely to engage in environmental and sustainability issues in the future. No participants selected

being less likely to engage or no change to express their feelings upon completion of the focus groups.

Appendix C: Focus Group Script

INTRODUCTION

Welcome and thank you for being here today. My name is _____ and my partner on the project is _____. I'll be the facilitator asking the questions for today's discussion, and _____ will be moderating the chat. If you have any technical problems or questions, please drop them in the chat, so she can assist you.

_____ and I are members of a University of Michigan student project team working in collaboration with the Michigan League of Conservation Voters to obtain baseline data on student perception and engagement in environmental policies and conservation efforts.

To assist us with data collection, this meeting will be recorded with auto transcription. The recording will not be used by anyone outside of the scholars team conducting this discussion, and you will not be identified by name in our findings. Once our analysis of the data is complete, we can provide you with a summary of the details.

If you are uncomfortable with being recorded, you are welcome to leave the meeting at this time. Everyone who would like to participate, please press the button prompt on your screen to enable the recording.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this focus group. If it isn't already, please update your Zoom screen name to show your first name. To get acclimated to one another, we'd like everyone to briefly introduce themselves. I'll introduce myself first, then I'll call on each of you in the order you appear on my screen. Please state your first name, year in school, major, and favorite ice cream flavor when we call on you.

participants introduce themselves

Before we jump into the questions, I'd like to go over a few guidelines for our discussion:

1. We want to hear from everyone. There are no right or wrong answers, so please share your thoughts and experiences openly, as much as you feel comfortable.
2. Be respectful of everyone in this discussion. Please keep your video on for the duration of the discussion and mute your microphone while others are speaking.
3. Use the "raise hand" function when you're ready to speak. I will prompt you when it's time to unmute.
4. We have limited time and want to be able to get through all the questions we have planned today, so we may need to interject during the conversation to stay on track.

POLITE INTERJECTIONS

1. Thank you for sharing, _____. I just want to make sure we stay on track so we can finish on time.

2. Thank you for sharing, _____. I just want to make sure we can hear from everybody.

QUESTIONS

For today's discussion, consider your experience from high school to the present. We want to make sure we're able to hear from everyone and that everything is working smoothly, so we're going to start off with a quick question. In your opinion, what is the biggest environmental issue in Michigan at this time? Please type your response in the chat. We may call on you to elaborate.

Prompt: climate change, safe and affordable drinking water, invasive species, air pollution, etc.

Next we would like everyone to answer a brief poll: In what ways have you engaged with environmental and sustainability issues? For this question, sustainability will be defined as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Engaging in environmental and sustainability issues can take many forms, such as recycling, volunteering, protesting, participating in group activities, providing educational resources, etc.

POLL: In what way(s) have you engaged with environmental and sustainability issues? (Select all that apply.)

1. Signed an online petition
2. Shared information about an issue on social media
3. Volunteered
4. Contacted your local, state, or federal legislators
5. Joined a student organization
6. Reduced your use of single-use plastics
7. Called voters on behalf of a phone bank
8. Other
9. None of the above

To gain a more complete picture of your engagement, I'm going to ask you some follow-up questions regarding each of your responses for the poll.

Question: For those who have engaged: please tell us what issues you took action on, what type of action did you take, and why?

Prompt: Examples of this can include, but are not limited to completing Planet Blue Ambassador training, participating in a walk-out, or emailing legislators to improve air quality by using cleaner energy resources.

Prompt: What led you to get involved?

Follow-up: Would you take these actions again? Why or why not?

Prompt: Do you feel the action you took was effective?

Question: For those who have not engaged, why not?

Prompt: Scheduling conflicts

Question: What has prevented you from engaging with sustainability or environmental issues, or you feel holds others back?

Follow-up: What would make it easier for you or other students to engage?

Question: Which methods of engagement do you feel have the most impact, and why?

Question: Are there other issues, other than the environment and sustainability, that you are or have engaged in?

RESERVE QUESTION

1. If you would like to engage on an issue, what steps would you take to accomplish this?
 - a. *Prompt:* Assuming nothing is preventing you from engaging, what resources could you access?

Our last question before closing is an exit poll. Please reflect on your experience with this focus group and select all options that apply.

POLL: After leaving this session, I feel _____. (Select all that apply.)

1. *I am less likely to engage*
2. *No change*
3. *I have learned something new*
4. *My perspective on an issue has changed*
5. *I'm more likely to engage in environmental and sustainability issues in the future*

CLOSING

Thank you for participating in this focus group today! Amazon gift cards will be sent to the email address you used to register within the next week. If you're interested in a way to support charitable organizations when you use your gift card, check out AmazonSmile, at no cost to you. As mentioned before, the data and responses will be confidential and we will let you know when our analysis and report is available. If there's something you weren't able to share during the course of this discussion, but would like to, please feel free to leave us a message in the chat. If you think of something later that you'd like to share, you may email us at _____.

Appendix D. MLCV Subteam 2 Summary Report

MLCV Subteam 2

Leah Adelman and Jackie Spryshak

Introduction

Our subteam worked with Michigan League of Conservation Voters, and authored an op-ed, and helped publicity with Voices for Carbon Neutrality. These efforts collectively worked to educate the public and gain momentum for the environmental issues in politics in Michigan.

Op-Ed Summary

The two main tasks we were assigned mainly targeted readers of environmental content and readers involved in local politics and conservation. For the first, we wrote an op-ed, about Line 5 and the recent events surrounding the revoking of Enbridge's easement in early 2021. Written from the perspective of MLCV, the goal of the op-ed was to support the efforts of Governor Whitmer and Attorney General Nessel in decommissioning Line 5 at the Straits of Mackinac, and persuade readers as to why these actions are beneficial to Michigan. By writing this piece for MLCV, we allowed more crucial tasks within the organization to be completed by easing the resource demand of a lower-priority task. Additionally, the use of this writing by MLCV will hopefully provide their audience with a stronger understanding of Line 5, its background, and the impact of the pipeline on Michigan's environment and economy. Importantly, the benefits of this knowledge are not limited to the reader - gaining a strong foothold of knowledge in highly politicized environmental matters such as Line 5 empowers individuals to make well-informed decisions while voting, and provides them with strong talking points when confronted by less-informed, argumentative individuals.

Additionally, we drafted an Executive Summary for the DNR's Public Land Strategy. This project consisted of several revisions to ensure concision, and soliciting feedback from peers and

family members on the accessibility of language in the summary. Going through each individual section, we selected the most important points and added them to a cohesive executive summary that effectively communicates key information in the Land Strategy, without the use of too much jargon and in a short enough format to keep audiences engaged. This task will ultimately assist MLCV's greater goal in driving public awareness of environmental matters in local government, making the Land Strategy more likely to be read and therefore familiarizing a greater number of people with a critical set of policies. The Executive Summary will educate audiences further on the use of public lands and therefore generate more votes by well-informed constituents.

Publicity Efforts for VCN's PCCN Recommendations

While our capacity to increase the audience for any online matter was limited, we turned to our personal connections and social networks to spread the word on this important task. In January, in response to the release of PCCN's draft recommendations, Voices for Carbon Neutrality (VCN) created a letter/petition outlining their comments and suggestions for the draft, from the perspective of environmental urgency and justice. The goal of this task was to increase awareness of VCN's comments, encourage critical thinking on the PCCN recommendations, and gain signatures for the VCN comments. This task was difficult to measure in terms of outcome, since we do not have access to the number of signatures before and after the push, nor can we attribute any specific increase in signatures to our efforts. However, Leah leveraged her position as president of the environmental fraternity, Epsilon Eta, and Jackie used her role as Co-President of Net Impact and Communications Coordinator for the Student Sustainability Coalition to increase the reach of VCN's comments. The letter was sent out to all Net Impact members, as well as in the SSC weekly newsletter and social media accounts, which have audiences of 1,600 and 2,000, respectively. With a click rate of around 11% per unique open, we can predict that from the newsletter alone, VCN's letter gained roughly 200 new views, and awareness without clicking and through our other channels likely drove that number up even further.

Gaining more signatures for the VCN letter/petition on the PCCN's draft recommendations elevated the outreach efforts of VCN. Although VCN is separate from MLCV, Lisa Wozniak, Director of MCLV is on the VCN commission and our partner liaison Bentley Johnson is part of

the organization. Additionally, MCLV often associates and collaborates with VCN. By increasing awareness and support of the VCN letter/petition on campus, we increased the impact UMich students have on this matter.

Conclusion

In summary, our subteam created tangible written pieces and helped to promote the most pressing environmental issues in Michigan. Line 5, the DNR's Public Land Strategy, and the PCCN draft are all unique and important sustainability matters in our state. Our subteam gained a familiarity with these subjects while acquiring more writing and organizing skills.