

ECOLOGICAL COMMITTEE MANUAL

Youthlinc
creating lifetime humanitarians



Everything you need to know to run a successful committee

YOUTHLINC Ecological COMMITTEE MANUAL

A complete guide for Mentors, Alum Leaders, and youth volunteers leading ecological projects abroad.

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PART 1. OVERVIEW

1.1 Why Ecology Matters

Every community in the world depends on clean water, healthy soil, and access to natural resources. Many rural communities Youthlinc partners with face challenges like:

- Deforestation
- Pollution
- Waste management issues
- Limited access to environmental education
- Changing weather patterns
- Erosion

The ecological committee helps make a difference by teaching environmental awareness and leading hands-on projects that protect and restore the local environment.

You don't have to be a "science genius". You just need to care about our planet and want to help communities protect the environment around them in simple, meaningful ways.

1.2 What the Ecological Committee Does

As a member of the ecological committee, you will help plan, prepare and lead ecological projects in three main ways:

Education

Part of your job is helping people understand the world around them and how small actions can help protect it. You will help raise awareness:

- Personally (in your own habits and choices)
- Locally (in the community you are in)
- Globally (how all ecosystems connect)

Your teaching helps communities become more self sufficient, aware, and more environmentally conscious.

Planting Projects

Planting trees or vegetation is one of the most powerful ecological activities you will lead. Trees help:

- Improve air quality
- Reduce erosion
- Store carbon
- Refresh water system
- Provide food, shade and even fuel

Your committee will work with our international partners to plan a planting project that will be most beneficial for the community and support natural resources.

Clean up

Your team will adopt the “travel without a trace” mindset. Prior to travel, the ecological committee will help oversee the packing meeting to ensure that all donations are being unwrapped and stored in reusable containers.

While in country, you’ll lead a clean up project that helps:

- Improve community health and wellness
- Increase a sense of community and safety
- Protect wildlife and natural resources.
- Reduce pollution in water, soil, and air

Even a small clean up can make a big impact.

1.3 What Makes This Committee Unique

Most Youthlinc committees focus on a specific skill. Ecology is different. Compared to other committees:

- Vocational: Focuses on job skills
- Cultural: Focuses on games, cultural exchanges
- Education: Focuses on practicing STEM or English
- Business: Focuses on the 4 P's
- Health: Focuses on health skills

Your committee impacts **everyone** in the community from farmers to families to teachers to schoolchildren. Healthy land and clean water support the entire community so your impact is wide reaching and long lasting.

1.4 Understanding Community Needs

Before planning any projects, your committee should understand what the community actually needs. Ask yourselves:

- What does the environment look like in this community?
- What ecological problems exist?
- What has been done in the past?
- What are the ICC recommendations?
- What ideas came from last year's committee reports?
- What research can your committee gather?

This information should come from:

- The In Country Coordinator
- Past Committee Reports
- Research from committee members

This helps ensure that your projects have real impact and are realistic and sustainable.

1.5 Committee Roles and Responsibilities

Mentor

- Guides overall planning and sustainability considerations
- Ensures all projects align with Youthlinc values
- Oversees safety, logistics, and lesson quality

Alum Leader

- Works closely with the Mentor
- Supports committee communication and deadlines
- Ensures all projects are fully prepared
- Helps train the committee

Committee Members

- Research ecological challenges
- Create lesson plan to teach
- Gather, organize and pack supplies
- Support community members and the team respectfully in country
- Participate in meetings and project preparation

PART 2: TRAINING TO LEAD

This section teaches committee members *how* to lead in a way that is respectful and engaging.

2.1 How to Lead as a Youth Volunteer

You do not need to be an expert. You just need to be:

- Prepared
- Patient
- Hands on
- Respectful
- Organized

Your role is to:

- Guide, not lecture
- Demonstrate clearly
- Encourage participation
- Create an environment of respect

2.2 What Good Hands On Skill instruction Looks Like

Effective lessons include: .

Step by Step Instructions

Show each step in small repeatable actions slowly before others try it.

Short Explanations, Long Demonstrations

Avoid long explanations, especially through an interpreter. Instead use your time to demonstrate the skill.

Active Participation

Allow everyone a chance to participate so they can learn by doing, not just seeing.

Repetition

Allow those learning to practice the steps multiple times.

Check for Understanding Often

If needed, review steps again to help the learning process.

Encouragement

Celebrate effort, not perfection.

2.3 Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Being aware of common mistakes helps prevent them.

Pitfall 1: Teaching too fast

Avoid by: Breaking projects into small steps and demonstrate slowly

Pitfall 2: Lessons are too advanced

Avoid by: Breaking into smaller steps.

Pitfall 3: Assuming people understand

Avoid by: Check for understanding by asking for a thumbs up or thumbs down

Pitfall 4: Using materials unavailable locally

Avoid by: Prioritizing local sourcing

Pitfall 5: Taking over the work.

Avoid by: Let those learning practice each step.

2.4 Working with Interpreters

Volunteers must learn and practice how to teach and facilitate activities while working with interpreters across language and cultural barriers.

- **Talk to your interpreter or share lesson plans with them before your presentation:**
The more your interpreter understands about the lesson before they assist you in

presenting the better their interpretation will be. It helps to be on the same page with them before you start your lessons.

- We recommend providing a copy of your lesson to your interpreter the night before each lesson.
- **Speak in small chunks:** 3-7 words, that complete a thought or sentence but include the context.
 - Example:
 - Instead of “today we are going to look at three different kinds of costs, which are fixed costs, variable costs...”
 - Try smaller chunks:
 - “Today we will discuss three types of costs” (Pause)
 - “Start up cost.” (Pause)
 - “Operating cost.” (Pause)
- **Look at Participants, NOT the interpreter**
- **Pause long enough for Interpretation:** Interpretation is cognitively draining, wait patiently for your interpreter.
- **Use gestures and body language:** body language can assist in context cues during your presentation, when talking try to exaggerate what you are saying by pointing, miming, or showing pictures. Visuals, in addition to an interpreter will help provide complete understanding.
- **Ask your interpreter for local examples:** Your interpreters not only know the language but they also understand the community and culture.

2.5 Ensuring Safety

Safety is important in all aspects of the Youthlinc experience. To ensure everyone's safety please:

- Model proper tool handling
- Use gloves
- Wear proper clothing and close toed shoes
- Use sun protection (sunscreen, hats, etc)
- Proper handling of trash

A safe environment = a successful project.

PART 3: ECOLOGICAL COMMITTEE PROJECTS

The Ecological Committee plans and prepares projects that help the environment and support the community.

The ecological committee doesn't just show up and plant trees—you plan, prepare, test ideas, and choose projects that actually make sense for the community you're working with. This section will help you understand how to choose the right project and prepare to teach it confidently.

3.1 Guiding Questions for Selecting Projects- Ask the Right Questions

- What are the main priorities of the community?
- Are there any topics that they would like to learn more about?
- Are there topics the community could teach us?
- What government programs are in place?
- What do they do to care for the land and resources?
- What environmental problems affect the area? (pollution, erosion, drought, etc)
- How is climate change impacting the community and how can we reduce this impact?
- What plants, animals, and natural resources are already present?
- Is there a need for a community garden?
- What can be planted, built or completed in the time we have?
- What can the community maintain long term?

3.2 Past Ecological Projects

- [Eco bricks](#)
- Planting trees or Shrubs
- [Waves for Water](#)
- Teaching the team about [Carbon Footprint](#)
- Recycling
- Upcycling
- Waste Management
- Square Foot Gardens
- Composting
- Deforestation
- Conservation

- Erosion prevention
- Food Security
- Incinerator

Your committee can choose one of these or create something new that fits the community's needs.

3.3 Educate

One of the most important jobs of the Ecological Committee is teaching. Your goal is to teach simple, meaningful habits that protect the environment.

Teaching ecology is about making ideas easy, practical, and connected to daily life

A few pointers for your committee:

Keep Things Realistic and Relevant

Ask yourself:

- Can people continue this after we leave?
- Does it solve a real issue?
- Is it something people want to learn about?

Teach Skills, Not Just Activities or Facts

Don't just *do* the thing, help people learn why it matters and how to use it again in the future.

- If you are teaching eco bricks, explain why reducing plastic waste matters.
- If you are planting trees, explain how these trees help the environment.
- If you are talking about pollution, connect it to local water sources.

Make Learning Interactive

Help people deepen their understanding by hands on learning.

- Sort real trash into categories
- Build a mini garden
- Test water samples
- Make eco bricks
- Create upcycled crafts

Learning is powerful when it is hands on, creative, visual, and fun!

Encourage Community Knowledge and Leadership

Many communities already have powerful environmental traditions. Ask:

- How do you take care of your land?
- How do you store water during the dry season?
- What plants grow well here?

Let them teach YOU. Shared learning builds respect and stronger relationships.

3.4 Planting

Planting is one of the most meaningful and visible ecological activities you can lead. Planting can help:

- Improve soil health
- Reduce erosion
- Increase shade
- Support water retention
- Clean the air
- Provide food or resources

Planting projects can include:

- Planting native trees or shrubs
- Creating square foot gardens
- Planting fruit trees
- Planting to help with erosion or flooding

3.5 Clean Up

Waste that goes unmanaged can be a health and safety hazard. You will work with your community to find an area that could use a clean up. This could be:

- A riverbank or water source
- A popular landmark
- A schoolyard
- Roadsides
- Tourist areas
- Farms or fields

As part of your clean up efforts to “leave no trace”, you will take 15 minutes each day to clean up

- Water bottles
- Snack wrappers
- Lesson supplies
- Any other garbage

3.6 Lesson Planning Guide

Every committee member will plan an environmental lesson. This lesson must include:

- An Objective
- Step by step instructions
- Time to practice
- Check out the Ecological and STEM Lesson Library

3.7 Practice, Practice, Practice

Your committee should practice so much that:

- You can explain the steps easily
- You can teach slowly
- You can troubleshoot challenges
- You can feel confident

If you can't *do* the thing, you can't *teach* the thing.

3.8 Ecological Project Library

Here are some suggestions of past teams ecological projects:

Ecological Lesson Plans

- URL to [linked PDF](#)

Eco Bricks

- URL to [linked PDF](#)

Upcycling

- URL to linked PDF

Composting

- URL to linked PDF (Leah)

Waves for Water

- URL [to linked PDF](#)

Square foot Gardening

- URL to linked PDF

PART 4: COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND PREPARATION

Committee work does not happen all at once. It builds little by little throughout the year as you learn more about your site, gather supplies, and practice the skills you'll be teaching. This section explains how your committee should prepare, what your meetings should look like, and what you need to have ready before you get on the airplane.

The main goal is simple:

Educate your team and the community, plant something, and plan a clean up project.

When you're prepared, you feel confident, you stress less in country, and the community gets the best experience possible.

4.1 Purpose Committee Meetings

Committee meetings are where the real preparation happens. These meetings give you the chance to:

- Plan your projects step by step
- Assign roles, responsibilities, and deadlines
- Practice lessons before teaching them
- Review tips from previous teams
- Gather, test, and organize supplies
- Ask questions and get feedback
- Make changes before things become stressful
- Keep everyone on track

These meetings should be supportive, organized, and collaborative. Everyone plays a role in making the magic happen and everyone has a job to do.

4.2 What Committee meetings Should Accomplish

Each meeting builds on the last. Each discussion, assignment, and check in should help your committee feel more confident and ready for meaningful work in country. By the time you travel, your committee should have:

Teaching and Education Preparation

- A solid plan on how you will educate the team and the community on ecological topics.
- Key topics you want everyone to understand.

Completed Lesson plans

Each committee member should have one environmental plan that includes:

- A written step by step lesson plan
- All supplies needed
- A “dry run” where you practice teaching
- A plan for teaching the lesson in small groups

Planting Project

- A plan for what the committee wants to plant or build in the community and why these choices were made
- This includes sustainability, community interest, climate considerations, etc

Clean up Plan

- A clean up plan for the team to “leave no trace”
- Ideas of where a clean up project might be useful in the community

These steps help your committee feel prepared and make sure that nothing important is left to figure out at the last minute.

4.3 Practice as a Committee

To teach a skill well, you need to feel comfortable doing it yourself. You don't need to be perfect, you just need to understand it well enough to explain it to another person.

Practicing helps you:

- Test your lesson plans
- Identify confusing steps
- Practice teaching with an interpreter
- Build your confidence
- Make sure supplies work the way you expect

Testing Together

As a committee, you should practice:

- The full lesson from start to finish
- Specific steps that are tricky or technical
- How you will explain things clearly and slowly

This helps you catch problems before you begin teaching the community.

Committee Check In Moments

Quick check ins help everyone stay on track. You can ask:

- What's finished?
- What still needs work?
- What supplies are missing?
- Is everyone clear on their tasks?

Good communication = Smoother meetings

4.4 How to Run an Effective Committee Meeting

Your Mentor or Alum Leader may help guide meetings, but your committee should be the ones leading.

A productive meeting includes:

1. **Agenda:** What we are focusing on today
2. **Quick updates:** Check in on assignments, what has been completed, review questions answered by ICC
3. **Focused work:** Practice lesson plans, review supply lists, problem solve challenges, make adjustments
4. **Team share:** Review what needs improvement, create a list of questions for ICC and share with Team Leader

5. **Assignments:** Assign tasks to complete before the next meeting. Assign who is doing what before the next meeting

Meetings work best when everyone participates and follows through with their tasks.

4.5 Final Preparation Before You Leave

By your final meeting, your committee should have:

- All lesson plans written, finalized, and practiced
- Any instructions printed and laminated
- Ecological projects fully organized
- Supplies taking in country gathered
- Supply list completed
- In country responsibilities assigned

At this stage, your job is to double check everything and make sure everyone knows their role. When you're prepared, committee work in country becomes fun, meaningful, and way less stressful.

PART 5: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This section provides practical tools and ready to use templates your committee will rely on as you prepare for the international experience. These resources make your planning more organized, keep your team on the same page, and help ensure everything is fully ready *before* departure.

Use these throughout the year, and especially during your Committee Meetings and Preparation sessions.

5.1 Ecological Project Proposal Template

Use [this template](#) when brainstorming ecological projects. .

This template will include:

- Project Description
- Desired Outcome
- Problem addressed
- Skill taught
- Assignments to committee members
- Materials needed
- Other needs from the team

5.2 Lesson Plan Template

Use this [lesson plan template](#) to create your ecological lesson plan.

This should include:

- Goal of the lesson- what you are teaching
- Who you will be teaching
- Materials needed
- Demonstration steps
- Lesson plan breakdown

5.3 Teaching Checklist

Before you teach ask yourself:

- Did I practice my lesson?
- Do I know the steps well?
- Do I have a simple explanation?
- Do I have visuals or examples?
- Do I have a back up plan?

5.4 Committee Check-in Sheet

Your committee will complete a [committee check in sheet](#) after each team meeting.

This check in will include:

- What you accomplished
- Tasks assigned to committee members
- What questions your committee has
- What you will work on during the next meeting

5.5 Monthly Planning Checklists

These checklists help your committee stay organized throughout the year.

January Checklist - Understand your committee

- Meet your committee and exchange phone numbers
- Decide how you will communicate throughout the year
- Listen to the presentation by last year's team leadership in your January Team Meeting
- Review this manual and additional resources
- Read last year's committee report
- Using this information, as a committee talk about the vocational projects the community has requested
- Begin brainstorming ideas

- Collect Clothes for Big Brothers Big Sisters Clothing Drive- this is what will fund your project!
- Assign tasks to committee members
- Complete [committee check in sheet](#)

February Checklist - Understand your site and brainstorm

- Review ICC worksheet about vocational project requested
- Follow up on committee assignments
- Brainstorm ideas of ecological projects based on your committee strengths and interests
- Delegate specific tasks to committee members
- Brainstorm ecological lesson plans
- Collect clothes for Big Brothers Big Sisters Clothing Drive
- Compile questions for ICC about ecological projects
- Complete [committee check in sheet](#)
- Assign tasks to committee members
- Complete first draft of your [Committee Project Proposal](#) and turn this into your Team Leader

March Checklist - Lesson assignments and drafts

- Review answers from ICC
- Follow up on committee assignments
- All team members are assigned an English lesson
- All committee members assigned an ecological lesson
- Complete Final [Committee Project Proposal](#)
- Complete [committee check in sheet](#)
- Begin compiling supply list
- Begin any supply donation drives
- Present any committee needs to the team
- Send questions for ICC to Team Leader
- Assign tasks to committee members
- Start planning committee meetings outside of team meeting

April Checklist - Practice and evaluate lessons (adapt)

- Review answers from ICC
- Follow up on committee assignments
- English lesson draft completed
- [Ecological lesson](#) draft completed
- Continue compiling supply list
- Continue collecting supplies through donation drives
- Send ICC questions to Team Leader
- Hold a separate committee meeting
- Complete [committee check in sheet](#)
- Practice presenting your English lesson
- Practice teaching your ecological lesson
- Present any committee needs to the team
- Send Team Leader any remaining questions for the ICC

May Checklist - Finalize and prepare all resources

- Check in with Team Leader about any updates from ICC
- Follow up on committee assignments
- Order supplies
- Gather all remaining supplies taking in country
- Complete [committee check in sheet](#)
- Double check all lesson plans are completed
- Hold an additional committee meeting
- Finalize your English lesson
- Finalize your ecological lesson
- Tie up all loose ends

June Checklist - Depart/Packing Meeting

- Review any last minute updates
- Finalize supply list
- Finalize all project details
- Bring all supplies to packing meeting
- Final review with Mentor and Alum Leader

- Laminate any instructions

5.6 On Site Daily Checklist

Each day in country, the committee should review:

- Interpreter is briefed
- Committee members know who is teaching when
- Materials are gathered/organized
- Everyone knows their role
- Safety reminders
- End of day reflection is completed

5.7 Committee Reflection Questions

Use these during nightly team meetings or committee check ins.

- What went well today?
- What was confusing and how can we fix it?
- What did we learn today?
- What do we need to adjust?
- Did anything surprise us?
- What do we want to remember about this experience?