

EarthCharterUS



***THE ART  
OF  
EARTH CHARTERING  
GUIDE***

***A Work in Progress to Inspire Reflections, Conversations and Actions to Make the Earth Charter's Vision and Principles for a Sustainable Future a Reality***

***You are invited to send your Earth Charter activities for inclusion in the Guide. Your contributions are essential for making the Guide meaningful.***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

***We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. The Earth Charter Preamble***

***The Earth Charter Preamble*** calls us, as citizens of one world, to declare our individual responsibility, to welcome a fundamental shift in values, and to unite in a shared vision as we create a more democratic, sustainable, and humane world community. This urgent appeal is echoed by hundreds of experts, leaders, visionaries, and ordinary citizens like us who are deeply concerned about the damage done to the earth and its vast web of interdependent communities. The call is compelling because the consequences of inaction will inevitably lead to a massive destruction of life by one species never before experienced in the evolution of the universe.

***The Earth Charter Principles***, which emerged out of a decade long, cross-cultural conversation of leaders and grassroots organizers, are described as the “common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed”. These principles are offered as guidelines. They are composed of sixteen precepts that clarify the fundamental values for us, the people of the Earth, to adopt in order to build a global community. Through the understanding and application of these values, action that brings about change emerges.

***The Way Forward*** states that the promise of the Earth Charter is a “renewal” or a “new beginning”. This speaks of the need for a vast transformation, the birthing of a new way of life that embraces our stewardship to this earth and our commitment to justice and democracy. Identified in *The Way Forward* are the requirements needed to fulfill this promise such as a change of mind (a paradigm shift) and a new eye on interdependence.

Aligning ourselves with the vision of the Earth Charter will enhance awareness of our interdependent self and strengthen our ability to advance our communities into the new era. How to transform this vision into reality, the principles into action, as we choose our future, is the work of the ***Art of Earth Chartering***.

## **WHAT IS THE ART OF EARTH CHARTERING**

*The Art of Earth Chartering (AEC) is the action-oriented, living reflection of the larger Earth Charter Initiative, most particularly its principles. It is the manifestation of the EC as it truly defines itself, the people's treaty. The AEC refers to the full embodiment by us, as individuals and communities, of the Earth Charter's impetus to build a sustainable, just, and peaceful world.*

*The role of the AEC is crucial because it bridges the gap between the principles in theory, internal reflection, and action on a personal and local level. It is the pragmatic wing of the organization inviting us to come aboard, to discover and embrace our interdependent self within this brilliantly designed, magnificently complex web of life. With a deeper awareness of our intimate interconnection with all beings and non-beings, the AEC helps us to explore concrete ways of implementing the EC principles and to engage in pro-active behaviors that improve our lives and our communities. As such the AEC, with our vital participation at its core, becomes the medium through which the principles come alive. Without our engagement, the Earth Charter's declaration runs the risk of subsisting as a philosophy that merely tickles the intellect. Only through our personal and communal actions, which bring the ideas to life, will the Earth Charter fulfill its mission.*

*The fundamental premise of the AEC is that each one of us is already perfectly qualified to participate in the creation of a more sustainable and just world. We do not need to become experts. Concern for the current state of affairs, love for humanity and the planet, a belief in the fundamental wholeness of the universe, and a genuine interest in finding solutions are the only requirements needed to bring forth a better life.*

*With its practical approach, the AEC makes it possible for each one of us to experience our interdependent self and find our unique way of making a difference. It provides guidance as we cultivate the inner fortitude needed to explore the paths leading to a better world and to move beyond our comfort zones, as this exploration requires. The AEC also offers a venue that stimulates inquiry into resources that expand our options and facilitate pro-active behaviors. With the support of the AEC, we become that one, joined with others, who the Earth Charter (as a mouthpiece for the planet) is calling upon for help.*

*The Art of Earth Chartering invites us all to respond to this urgent call with great courage and wisdom as it urges us to remember that any small action we take is a significant contribution to the grander transformation. The AEC will bolster us as we become pro-active citizens and communities co-creating a better world.*

## **CLAIMING OUR INHERENT INTERCONNECTION**

*When we try to pick anything out by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.*  
*JohnMuir*

*One of the most fundamental principles that sustains the Earth Charter and is emphasized and promoted in this guidebook is the core interdependence that permeates the universe and that exists within humanity itself. This dynamic interconnection between all that exists is the essence of creation. In order to bring about sustainable lifestyles in our personal world and in our community, a deep awareness of this principle is imperative.*

*The progressive sciences have joined with the ancient Eastern teachings and the wisdom traditions of earth-based cultures (a true merging of science and spirituality) to form a systemic/holistic approach to understanding life. This approach is emerging as the prevalent framework that bolsters our expanding knowledge of the universe as an intricately complex web. Systems theory enables us to see that everything in the universe is both a part in a whole and a whole unto itself. As we have become more conscious of the highly sophisticated relationships of wholes and their reliance on one another our understanding of the interconnection of all beings has widened. Within this more expanded understanding we have realized how one action has an impact on the surrounding life systems in ways that are either obvious or hidden, enhancing or destructive.*

*Many of the actions taken by human beings within the context of our hard driving economy and our 21<sup>st</sup> century lifestyles have had a disastrous impact on the living ecosystem and on human society. The Earth's natural resources are becoming depleted, the state of our environment is in serious peril, the economic gap between humans has widened, and tensions within and between societies are deepening. The rejection of a systemic approach that values the inherent interconnection of all life is the primary cause of such vast destructiveness. Many leaders, experts, and ordinary citizens now know that if this rejection continues the quality of life of future generations will be seriously impaired.*

*For a long time much of the destructive impact on our ecosystem and on society has gone unrecognized by the majority of people in the industrialized world. Our comfortable, modern life styles have dangerously blinded us to the ever-growing*

*deterioration of the Earth and to the unfair economic and social positions of many of our fellow humans . Given the current extent of the damage and the strong voices of many, it is now virtually impossible not to notice, and even feel directly, the impact of this deterioration.*

*The Earth Charter views “sustainable life styles” through a prism from which five interconnected elements are reflected. Each is related to and affected by the others ultimately creating the conditions defining how we live with each other and with the Earth. Each element refers to an area we human beings are able to impact with our choices and actions. As we learn to fully adopt sustainable practices all five areas need to be addressed making this a truly holistic approach where the interconnection between all the elements is considered and honored.*

*The five elements of sustainability as defined by the Earth Charter are the ecology, social justice, economic fairness, participatory democracy, and non-violence. There are countless examples of how these five areas are affected by each other. For example, when an organic approach (more ecologically sensitive) to planting coffee is used, the health and well being of the soil, the coffee growers, and the customers are all positively affected. When fair trade practices are used to produce this coffee the social and economic rights of the coffee growers are considered which leads them to become more empowered participants within their community. Coffee growers who feel like strong members of a participatory democracy are more likely to employ non-violent approaches to conflict. Through this example we notice how all five elements, as seen through the sustainability prism, impact each other (in this case positively) with the employment of fair trade practices.*

*The time has come for us, equipped with more knowledge and with the ability to access cutting edge information on sustainable practices (currently employed by many innovative individuals and businesses), to explore together ways of implementing a life style that is fully committed to respecting all life, human and non-human. The Art of Earth Chartering, with its emphasis on building awareness and promoting action, offers a venue dedicated to help all interested individuals gain insights on the concept of interdependence and adopt concrete actions that bring forth sustainable life styles.*

## **THE ART OF EARTH CHARTERING GROUPS**

*The medium through which the AEC brings to life the Earth Charter principles is small group gatherings. These groups are encouraged to meet once per week for six or more weeks. The activities in this guidebook are offered to help the group clarify its intention*

*and focus during each meeting. One or two guides can use the guidebook for assistance in facilitating the meetings.*

*The general goals of the groups are to raise consciousness about the interconnection of all life, to clarify the role of each individual as one part of the whole universe, and to discover concrete ways of putting the EC principles into action.*

*With a balance of structured, focused activities and time for sharing, these groups become viable resources for information, support, inspiration, and guidance, while also instilling courage and hope as participants examine themselves and their communities seeking more sustainable and just lifestyles.*

### **WHY GATHER IN GROUPS**

*In facing (our fate) together openly and humbly, we rediscover our interconnectedness in the web of life. From that rediscovery springs courage, a deeper sense of community, and insights into our power and creativity.*

*Joanna Macy*

*We experience the effects of the current state of affairs as one human family. Together we share a common fate and a common challenge. However, one of the troubling consequence of these times is the splintering of communities and the subsequent sense of separateness and isolation many of us feel. In this unsettled state we may experience overwhelming emotions, powerlessness, hopelessness, confusion, or sheer numbness when confronted with the question of how to repair the damage done to this exquisite earth and its complex web of life. These reactions are natural because the problem is huge and the task before us tremendous.*

*Joining together as individuals and reclaiming our sense of community is an essential step towards empowering ourselves and healing the planet as a whole. Great transformations have occurred as a result of common efforts, turned into grassroots organizations, which ushered in new ways of thinking resulting in a significant paradigm shift in the collective consciousness.*

*One example of this common effort is the women's movement, which brought forth massive cultural changes. Small groups of women gathered nationwide telling stories about the oppression of patriarchy, becoming validated as equal human beings, and supporting each other as they reached into their communities as true change makers. They improved their unjust lot in life by fighting endlessly to revolutionize the gender*

*roles in society. These women were regular people. Not experts. Not scholars. Not stars. Not millionaires. They were people like you and me who brought forth one of the grandest shifts in the history of human evolution.*

*We must allow the success of grassroots efforts like the women's movement to remind us of the powerful influence we human beings have when we work together with shared goals. It is now imperative that we harness that power once more in our attempts to restore the balance required for all of us and our planet to survive. History proves to us that a highly effective way of becoming an instrument of change is to join with others, form groups with common goals, and collectively harvest the creative forces that inevitably emerge from focused human bonding.*

*The AEC extends an invitation to everyone interested in becoming part of a growing mass of people, who are the true pioneers who are ushering in a more sustainable way of living and are tired of passively observing the destruction of people, this beautiful planet and our most cherished human institutions. The AEC invites us to join these pioneers and to deepen the understanding of our unique role in this great transformation.*

*The following statements explain more fully the reasons why groups are one of the most effective vehicles through which we can learn how to embody and activate the Earth Charter principles in our day to day lives.*

- 1. In groups we can reclaim our long lost sense of community which enables us to feel connected to others. This human bonding breeds general feelings of well being and vitality that fuel the energy needed for the work before us.*
- 2. In groups we receive support as we experience the uncomfortable emotions that naturally surface when facing the magnitude of the problems and challenges. The support helps us process these feelings so that they mobilize us rather than paralyze us. Group support is also very useful as we take the risks involved in going out into our communities advocating change, raising awareness, and implementing new behaviors.*
- 3. In groups a creative synergy arises where the fruits of brainstorming and sharing become much greater than individual results. This is a strong reflection of the collaborative nature of life itself and mirrors for us, through direct experience, the benefits of our inherent interdependence.*
- 4. In groups we gain an empowering feeling that enhances our motivation. With more motivation we become pro-active and less likely to let feelings of discouragement stop us.*

*5. In groups a strong momentum is created. Ongoing relationships and co-created endeavors are often the result of this momentum.*

*6. With a deeper sense of community, the collective support, the creative synergy, the enhanced motivation and momentum groups are able to sustain our hope for a better future. With hope we are replenished to go forward with a larger reservoir of stamina and grace.*

### ***HOW TO GET A GROUP TOGETHER***

*There are several ways to gather people to participate in the The Art of Earth Chartering. Only one motivated individual interested in activating the Earth Charter principles is needed to jump start a group. The following ideas refer to different methods that can be employed to start a group.*

*1. Send an e-mail, flyer or make phone calls to all your friends and acquaintances. Make sure that dates and locations of meetings are clear. Describe briefly what is at stake and what there is to gain. It is helpful to state that every individual and every small action makes a difference. Ask everyone to bring a friend and spread the word. If you are already leading a group ask participants to start a new group.*

*2. Put a flyer up at your place of worship, workplace, local book store/health food store and any other public place with a bulletin board.*

*3. Ask your religious leader to join the hundreds of clergy involved in merging religion with eco-activism and get his/her support and help in getting a group started. Request eco-sensitive sermons.*

*4. Check and see if your local college and university have courses on sustainable life styles or environmental sciences and talk to the instructor for ideas. Encourage the instructor and his social circle to get involved.*

*5. Call your local public radio station to see if they can broadcast public service announcements about the Art of Earth Chartering and the group you are trying to get started.*

*6. Call your local newspaper, including neighborhood newspapers, and ask if they are willing to put a free ad as their contribution to the fight for the survival of the earth community. Talk to someone in the advertising department. Most people want to help.*

*7. Make a small business size card with information on the group, how to contact you, and spread it around as you meet people. This is what many people do to promote their business. Why not do this to promote the AEC?*

*8. If you are a member of a professional organization ask if you can make an announcement at the meetings. If your professional organization has a newsletter (many do) ask if you can put in an ad for free. The ad can state the same information that is in the EC business card.*

### **THE GROUP SETTING**

*Participants can meet in a variety of settings. It is important for the group to be comfortable and free of distractions. It is also a good idea to encourage “breaking bread” together by encouraging people to bring food and beverages which instills a casual and friendly atmosphere.*

*1. Private homes are often very good settings if they are comfortable and intimate. This environment tends to put participants at ease and therefore more likely to open up.*

*2. Places of worship are excellent settings because they accommodate a larger number of people and are usually comfortable and private. Holding the meeting here is likely to draw people from the congregation itself. If the minister of the church becomes supportive of the Earth Charter Initiative he/she could become a strong community voice to further spread the word.*

*3. Libraries have private rooms that can be reserved. These rooms are very quiet and private. Libraries are centrally located and easy to find. This setting is good for a neighborhood group.*

*4. Restaurants are good settings if they have a private room that can be reserved. However, restaurants require that people purchase a meal and some participants may not like this. Some small restaurants are willing to reserve the whole space for a group gathering.*

*5. Parks and private back yards are wonderful meeting places when the weather permits. The presence of the natural environment is particularly appropriate when the*

*goal of the group activity is to raise awareness about ecological issues. Participants can sit in a circle on the ground and the natural setting can become incorporated in the activity whenever possible.*

## **THE GROUP FORMAT**

*This guidebook, through its activities, offers a structure that the AEC groups can use to maximize consciousness raising and action-oriented problem solving regarding the application of the Earth Charter principles. The activities presented are simply suggested guidelines and are not written in stone. The guides leading the groups can use their own creativity to supplement the activities just like many cooks alter a recipe.*

*The format presented in this guidebook encourage the guide to make a brief clarification about the purpose of the particular activity followed by a either a meditation or a sample short lecture. This is often followed by the shared reading of handouts. Open, focused discussions, creative brainstorming, and group support is encouraged. Many groups end with an invocation of some sort that punctuates the discovered insights and the group's intention as participants move forward.*

## **THE ROLE OF THE GUIDE**

*Each group will need to be facilitated by one or more guides so that the process flows smoothly and constructively. Groups can be facilitated by one guide, a group of two or more guides, or by a shared leadership style where different members take turns leading the activities.*

*Each guide has a unique style. If a guide has had experience with meditation he/she might want to incorporate a certain type of meditation regarding an EC principle. Some meditations are offered in the activity section of this guidebook. If a guide is very articulate he/she may want to do a little research on a current community initiative that already applies an EC principle and make a short speech followed by a group discussion. The guides should use their own personal strengths to design the group so that his/her style becomes part of the guiding process. It is important for the guides to always stay focused on the EC principles and on ways of applying them in life. Regardless of leadership style, the guides need to make sure that participants have opportunities to express their opinions, questions, and reactions.*

## **TIPS FOR THE GUIDES**

*The following pointers refer to various things guides can do in order to create an environment where group participants feel comfortable exploring how to apply the EC principle in their lives.*

- 1. Create a safe setting that engenders trust through respectful listening and non-pressuring invitations to share.*
- 2. Present the goals of the day's activity and elicit agreement on them.*
- 3. Formally, at the beginning of each activity, dedicate the work to welfare of the planet and all beings.*
- 4. Help the group stay focused on the activity and its main themes.*
- 5. Work with the time limitations in a way that does not rush or drag things out.*
- 6. Help the group enjoy itself reminding them of the importance of experiencing joy as they apply the principles.*
- 7. Make sure you have an opening and a closing activity to help contain the group activity within "an island in time" where participants are freed from their life demands.*

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTIVITIES**

*The activities that follow are divided in five different sections each corresponding to one of the five interdependent elements for a sustainable way of life as defined by the Earth Charter. The titles for each section are:*

*Activities for Economic Equity  
Activities for Social Equity  
Activities for Ecological Integrity  
Activities for Participatory Democracy  
Activities for Nonviolence and Peace*

*Each of the five sections begins with the Earth Charter principles that more directly relate to the activities of that particular section. It is, however, important for the guide to impart the message that the principles are interdependent. The full embodiment of*

*one principle is not possible without the full embodiment of the others since the goal of a sustainable way of life is one that encompasses all five elements addressed in the full range of activities.*

*As stated in TIPS FOR THE GUIDES, the guides are encouraged to start each activity by having a shared reading of the Earth Charter Preamble and the noted relevant principles. With a few of the participants reading out loud the group begins to settle into a common focus and an inspiring mood is set for the activity that follows. A copy of the Earth Charter Preamble follows this introduction.*

## **THE EARTH CHARTER PREAMBLE**

*We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of the Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.*

### **Earth, Our Home**

*Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depends upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.*

### **The Global Situation**

*The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The*

*foundation of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous- but not inevitable.*

### ***The Challenges Ahead***

*The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce the impact on our environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.*

### ***Universal Responsibility***

*To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.*

*We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.*

*(After reading the preamble the guide or another group participant can read the principles relevant to today's activity. Time can be made to discuss any reactions people might be having to these readings.)*