Using Criteria-Based Decision Making

In both steps 2 and 4, students will be asked to use criteria to select their issue and their action plan respectively. The following outlines best practices for explaining and establishing criteria that results in strong civic action projects.

Introducing "Criteria"

In order to make all of our decisions we use some form of criteria to narrow down our options and arrive at a final selection. Criteria are defined as "standards on which decisions are based." For example, something a simple as what to have for lunch requires us to measure our options against a defined set of criteria. For choosing lunch our criteria might include things like: location, dietary restrictions, price, or how hungry we are.

To introduce the concept of using criteria to students, begin with a simple question you believe will resonate with students. What movie should we see? Where should we go for vacation? What game should we play at recess?

Using the chosen question, students can brainstorm a list of criteria they might use answer the question. If the list generated is long, have the students work to sort some of the criteria into 4-5 similar categories.

Students can then create a chart like the one below to help them rank their choices.

Question: _____

	Option 1:	Option 2:	Option 3:
Criteria #1:			
Criteria #2:			
Criteria #3:			
Criteria #4:			
Criteria #5:			

After completing this piece, it is now time to apply their knowledge of criteria to the issues they have discovered or action plan proposed.

Using Earth Force Criteria to Select an Issue or Action Plan

Below you will find a chart of the criteria categories that Earth Force has found to be helpful in selecting issues and actions that will result in meaningful civic action projects. Earth Force believes that the best projects result from considering the amount of student voice involved, basic issues of practicality, use of civic skills, and the overall environmental impact. Under each category of criteria you will find a few questions that pinpoint topics for discussion and further explain the meaning of each category. You may use this table to start discussion with your students. You may also assign point values to the answers (i.e. a point for every yes or a scale) to come up with concrete scores for each issue or action proposed.

You and your students are encouraged to add additional categories as needed based on your discussions, though remember that too many criteria can actually make the process more difficult. We recommend no more than 6.

Student Voice	Practicality	Civic Engagement/Skills	Environmental Impact
Participation: *Can everyone be a part of this?*	Time: *Can we accomplish this action in our timeframe?*	Community: *Does this require us to interact with local the local community?*	Measurable: *Can I measure the impact of this solution?*
Interest: *Is this project fun and interesting for us to work on?*	Legality: *Is this project legal?*	Decision-makers: *Will we engaging with decision makers and people in power?*	Sustainable: *Is a project that will lead to a more sustainable community? Will it continue even after I am gone?*

Understanding: *Can I explain this project? Does it make sense to me?*	Money: *Do we have the funds to complete this project? Can we get the funds to complete this project?*	Policy and Practice: *Does this solution address underlying policies and practices?*	Research: *Is the solution based on reliable/credible information?*
	Accessible: *Are we working within an accessible area?*		Data-driven: *Is the solution based on quantitative data?*

Using the above categories and any additional ones suggested you may rank your issues or proposed action solutions.

	Option 1:	Option 2:	Option 3:
Student Voice			
Practicality			
Civic Engagement & Skills			
Environmental Impact			
Additional Criteria			
Additional Criteria			

Now that students have considered their ideas against their criteria, we recommend students engage in at least one other form of democratic decision making to arrive at their final selection. See the resource page for an overview of more democratic decision making processes.