Climate Policy Engagement: The crucial gap in higher ed and community sustainability
In order for a democracy to work for its citizens, there must be open communication between elected officials and their constituents [...] Therefore, universities should feel obligated to not only educate their students about voting in elections, but also to teach other ways for students to voice their opinions through civil discourse.”

- Lucien Wallace, Student, Worcester Polytechnic Institute.
Essential Skills

Teaching students skills to participate in governmental policy decisions that affect their lives.

Learn the skills at the core of higher ed:

- Critical thinking
- Writing
- Communication
- Teamwork/Collaboration

(Cress 2012)
“Students [and community members] can learn valuable professional communication skills by talking to policy makers. It's our future at stake. We need to learn how to protect it through policy”

- Vivian Sang-Me Kim, student, University of Michigan
Facilitating connection

- Action-oriented education for democracy challenges and changes students [and others] into pro-active citizens.

- Prepares people for active, engaged life of full participation in the economic, government, and community organizations that frame their lives.

( Robinson and Hurd 2020 )
Benefits: Higher-level Learning outcomes

- Students learn more! (Gallini and Moely 2003)

- Skills learned during action-oriented education for democracy are the real world systems change skills desired by employers (Rowe and Hiser 2015)
Voting is essential for overall change but it can only go so far - change and progress happens with engaging local representatives and policy issues.

- Jenny Kim, student
Bridging the Gap

- Rather than lobbying for particular candidates, education for democracy brings real constituent views to policymakers.

- Teaching the skills of democracy highlights the fundamental right to contact elected officials and participate in democracy.

- Inform policy makers with the facts from higher education.
In conclusion, Sustainability Policy Partners create climate solutions and a healthier democracy

Students need to be shown that our voice has impact, far more than just our vote. An engaged democracy need engaged citizens.

- Logan, student
Takeaway- Different for each audience:

Monthly calls?

New student SPP fellows

Marketing (AASHE, listservs, handshake) to get new student fellows

Webinar (AASHE, DANS, HEASC cosponsored) to get new campuses/campus champions
Bridging the Gap cont.

- Improve society while building employability skills
- Combining intellectual and practical skills connects the local to the global
- Educating students for democracy connects the classroom to the community