TRAINING MODULE 1

EU Legal Framework on Environmental Activism

XX September 2026

EnviRights
Empowering eNVIronmental RIGHTS defenders through monitoring, capacity building and advocacy in Europe

Co-funded by the European Union

01

Agenda Overview

Time	Topic	Speaker
9:30-9:15	Introduction & Icebreaker	Alice Fantin (ALDA)
9:15-9:35	Content Input 1: Human Rights Frameworks • EU legal framework overview • ECHR and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights • Key rights for environmental defenders (Articles 11 & 12) • Selected EU case law	Alice Fantin (ALDA)
9:35-9:55	Content Input 2: The Aarhus Convention • Environmental democracy and participation rights • Access to information, public participation & access to justice • Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee (ACCC) • Practical case examples	Eva Schwan (Green Legal Impact)
9:55-10:10	Q&A	Eva Schwan (Green Legal Impact)
10:10-10:20	*Break*	
10:20-11:00	Interactive Activity	GLI / ALDA Support
11:00-11:15	Debrief: Group discussion and key takeaways	GLI
11:15-11:30	Closing: Wrap-up and next training modules	ALDA

02

Survey Assessment Before the Training

Empowering eNVIronmental RIGHTS defenders through monitoring, capacity building and advocacy in Europe

Please scan the QR code to complete the pre-training survey.

Your responses will help us measure learning and perceptions before and after the training.

What is EnviRights?

EnviRights

Empowering eNVIronmental RIGHTS defenders through monitoring, capacity building and advocacy in Europe

An EU-funded project under the CERV Programme that strengthens the protection of environmental activists and human rights defenders across Europe, in line with

- Article 11 (Freedom of Expression)
- Article 12 (Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association)

of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.



Our Partners

VOL.TO VOLONTARIATO TORINO ETS

UNIVERSITÀ DI TORINO

green legal impact.

emla

HYP hellenic youth participation

ERD

alda

Objectives & Opportunities

EnviRights

Empowering eNVIronmental RIGHTS defenders through monitoring, capacity building and advocacy in Europe

Our Objectives

- Monitor violations of environmental activists' rights
- Strengthen activists' legal knowledge, awareness and resilience
- Foster dialogue between activists, media, public authorities and policymakers
- Promote a safe and enabling civic space for environmental action

What You Can Benefit From

- Monitoring of environmental activists' rights across Europe
- A digital platform to report rights violations
- Training and practical learning resources
- Awareness and advocacy initiatives
- Policy recommendations to strengthen activists' rights

04

Training Programme

This module is part of a broader EnviRights training programme delivered across the partner countries, combining:

- online learning
- national workshops
- practical tools and resources

Today's session: EU Legal Framework for Environmental Activists (2 days)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this training you will:

- Understand how the EU legal system works.
- Become familiar with the main EU laws protecting environmental activists
- Understand how environmental rights are protected at EU and international level
- Know where to find reliable legal resources
- Better understand the legal language used in EU policies and legislation

05

Who’s in the room?

Participants’ introduction



06

Environmental Activism and Human Rights

What is environmental activism?

Environmental activism is the peaceful action taken by individuals or groups to protect the environment and influence environmental decision-making.

It can take many forms, including:

- demonstrations and marches
- petitions and campaigns
- dialogue with public authorities
- climate litigation
- peaceful civil disobedience



Human rights provide the legal foundation that protects their right to speak up, organise and participate in environmental democracy.

Who are environmental defenders?

According to the United Nations, environmental human rights defenders are people who peacefully protect human rights related to the environment, including land, water, air, biodiversity and natural resources.

Why do they need legal protection?

Environmental defenders often face:

- intimidation and harassment
- criminalisation
- restrictions on protests
- climate litigation
- violence and threats

Human rights provide the legal foundation that protects their right to speak up, organise and participate in environmental democracy.

PART I

Human Rights Frameworks for Environmental Defenders

Understanding the legal foundations that protect environmental defenders in Europe



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07

1.Understanding EU Legal Frameworks

Before exploring specific rights, let's first understand how EU law is organised.

Today's journey:

- EU Legal System
- Primary Law & Secondary Legislation
- Human Rights Frameworks
- Key Rights for Environmental Activists
- Case Law & Legal Protection



2. Understanding EU Legal Frameworks



EU PRIMARY LAW

The Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights establish the constitutional foundations for protecting environmental rights and civic participation.

EU SECONDARY LEGISLATION

Directives, regulations and other legal instruments implement environmental protection, access to justice and public participation across the EU.

WHY IT MATTERS

Together, these legal frameworks safeguard environmental defenders, strengthen democratic participation and promote access to environmental justice.

Primary Law: The Foundation of EU Law

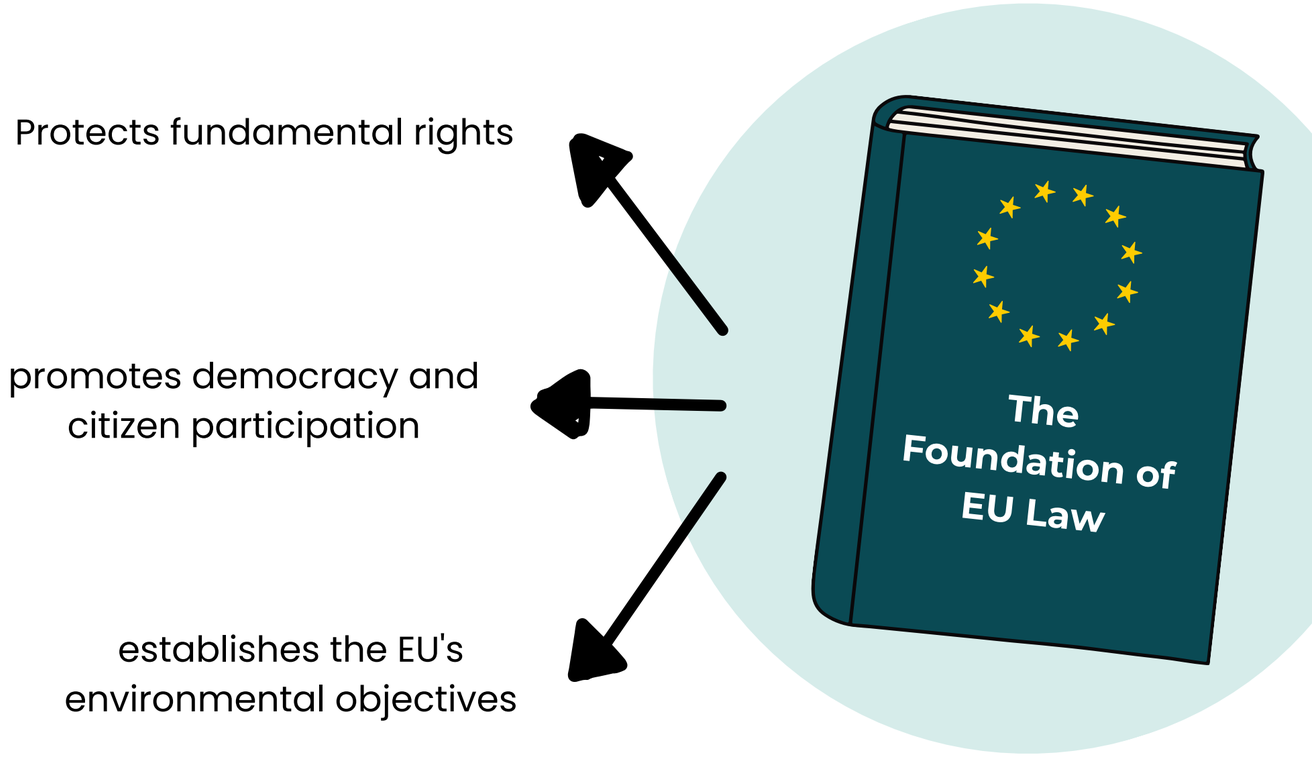
What is Primary Law?

Primary Law is the highest level of EU law. It establishes the values, objectives and legal framework of the European Union.

Main sources:

- Treaty on European Union (TEU)
- Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)
- Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (CFR)

Why is it important for environmental activists?



The Three Pillars of Primary Law

Document	Why it matters
Treaty on European Union (TEU), 2007	Establishes the EU's values, democracy and citizen participation.
Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), 1957	Defines the EU's competences, including environmental policy and its guiding principles.
Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR), 2000	Protects fundamental rights, including freedom of expression (Art. 11) and peaceful assembly (Art. 12).



Environmental principles in the TFEU:

- precaution
- prevention
- polluter pays
- rectification at source

Secondary Legislation: Turning Principles into Action

What is Secondary Legislation?

Secondary legislation is adopted by EU institutions to implement the Treaties.

Primary Law tells us *what* should be protected.
Secondary Legislation explains *how* this protection is implemented.



Regulations	directly applicable in all Member States
Directives	set objectives that Member States must implement through national law
Decisions	binding on those to whom they are addressed

Key EU Directives Supporting Environmental Activism

Directive	Why it matters
2003/4/EC	Right to access environmental information held by public authorities.
2011/92/EU	Public participation in environmental decision-making (Environmental Impact Assessment).
2004/35/EC	Environmental liability based on the polluter pays principle.
2010/75/EU	Public participation in industrial permitting and pollution control.

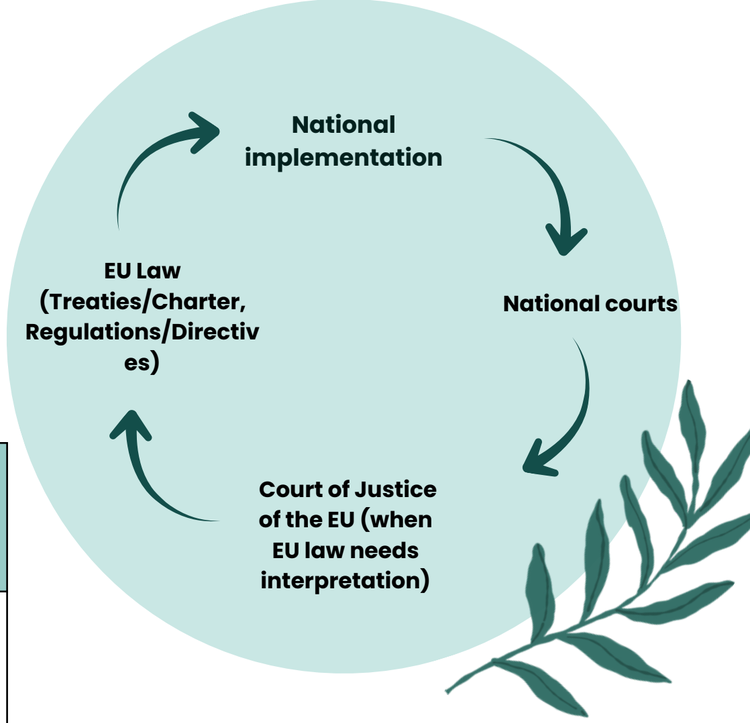
Together, these laws promote:

- transparency
- public participation
- accountability
- access to justice

08

How EU Law Works in Practice

Step	What happens?
🇪🇺 EU Law	The EU adopts Treaties, Regulations and Directives.
🏛️ National Law	Member States implement EU Directives into national legislation.
⚖️ National Courts	Individuals normally enforce their rights before national courts.
🇪🇺 CJEU	The Court of Justice interprets EU law to ensure it is applied consistently across the EU.



3

Human Right Relevant for Environmental Defenders

Understanding the fundamental rights that protect environmental activism and civic participation in Europe.



09

Where are Human Rights Protected?

Two key human rights systems in Europe

European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

- Council of Europe system (Strasbourg)
- Applies in 46 countries
- Interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR)

- EU legal system (Luxembourg)
- Applies when EU law is implemented or applied
- Interpreted by the Court of Justice of the EU

Shared relevance for environmental defenders:
freedom of expression
freedom of assembly
access to justice
environmental-related rights (indirectly or directly)

From Human Rights to Environmental Activism

Environmental activism as protected democratic participation



Environmental activism is supported by human rights because it includes:

- speaking out on environmental issues
- organising collective action
- participating in public decision-making
- peaceful protest and civil disobedience
- Key legal foundation

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights → especially Articles 11 and 12

4

Key Charter Rights for Environmental Defenders

Understanding the fundamental freedoms that protect
environmental advocacy, participation and peaceful protest.



Key Rights for Environmental Activists



Focus of this training

- Article 11 – Freedom of expression and information
- Article 12 – Freedom of assembly and association
- Article 47 – Right to an effective remedy (later section)

Why they matter?

They protect:
speaking out
organising movements and NGOs
protesting peacefully
participating in environmental democracy

Article 11: Freedom of Expression and Information



What it protects

- right to express opinions
- right to receive information
- right to share ideas

Why it matters for environmental defenders

- environmental campaigning
- public communication and advocacy
- access to environmental information
- media and digital activism

Article 12: Freedom of Assembly and Association

What it protects

- peaceful assembly (protests, marches)
- freedom of association (NGOs, movements)

Why it matters

- environmental protests and climate movements
- civil society organisations
- collective action and mobilisation



Case Law: How Courts Apply These Rights



Courts interpret Articles 11 and 12 in cases involving:
NGOs and civil society space
environmental participation
protest and civic freedoms

How rights work in practice?

Schmidberger v Austria (C-112/00) - Peaceful environmental protest

Frumkin v Russia (ECtHR, Application No. 74568/12) - peaceful assemblies

How have Articles 11 and 12 (EU Charter) and related rights under the ECHR been interpreted by the courts?



Schmidberger v Austria (C-112/00)	Frumkin v Russia (Application No. 74568/12, ECtHR)
Right involved Freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly (rights now reflected in Articles 11 and 12 of the EU Charter)	**Right involved** Freedom of peaceful assembly (Article 11 ECHR) and freedom of expression (Article 10 ECHR)
What happened? A group of environmental activists organised a peaceful protest blocking a motorway in Austria to raise awareness about heavy traffic and environmental impacts.	**What happened?** A peaceful protest camp was organised in Moscow. The authorities dispersed the assembly and arrested one of the organisers.
Court's decision The CJEU confirmed that peaceful protest is a fundamental right. Authorities must balance economic interests with fundamental rights, even when protests cause temporary disruption.	**Court's decision** The ECtHR found a violation of the right to peaceful assembly. Authorities must facilitate peaceful protests and any restrictions must be necessary and proportionate.
Why it matters Peaceful environmental protests remain protected as a form of democratic participation, even when they temporarily interfere with everyday activities.	**Why it matters** Public demonstrations on matters of public interest, including environmental issues, are protected expressions of democratic participation. Restrictions cannot discourage people from exercising their rights.

What If My Rights Are Violated?



Legal pathways:

- National courts → first level of protection
- EU law application → when Charter or EU law is involved
- CJEU → interpretation of EU law (not appeal court)

Key idea:
Rights are mainly enforced at national level, within EU legal framework

Reference list

- https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/11-freedom-expression-and-information
- https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/12-freedom-assembly-and-association
- https://docs.un.org/en/A/71/281
- https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/types-eu-law_en
- https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF
- https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT:en:PDF
- https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf
- https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2003/4/oj/eng
- https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/92/oj/eng
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- https://fra.europa.eu/it/caselaw-reference/cjeu-case-c-7818-judgment
- https://fra.europa.eu/en/caselaw-reference/cjeu-case-c-11200-opinion

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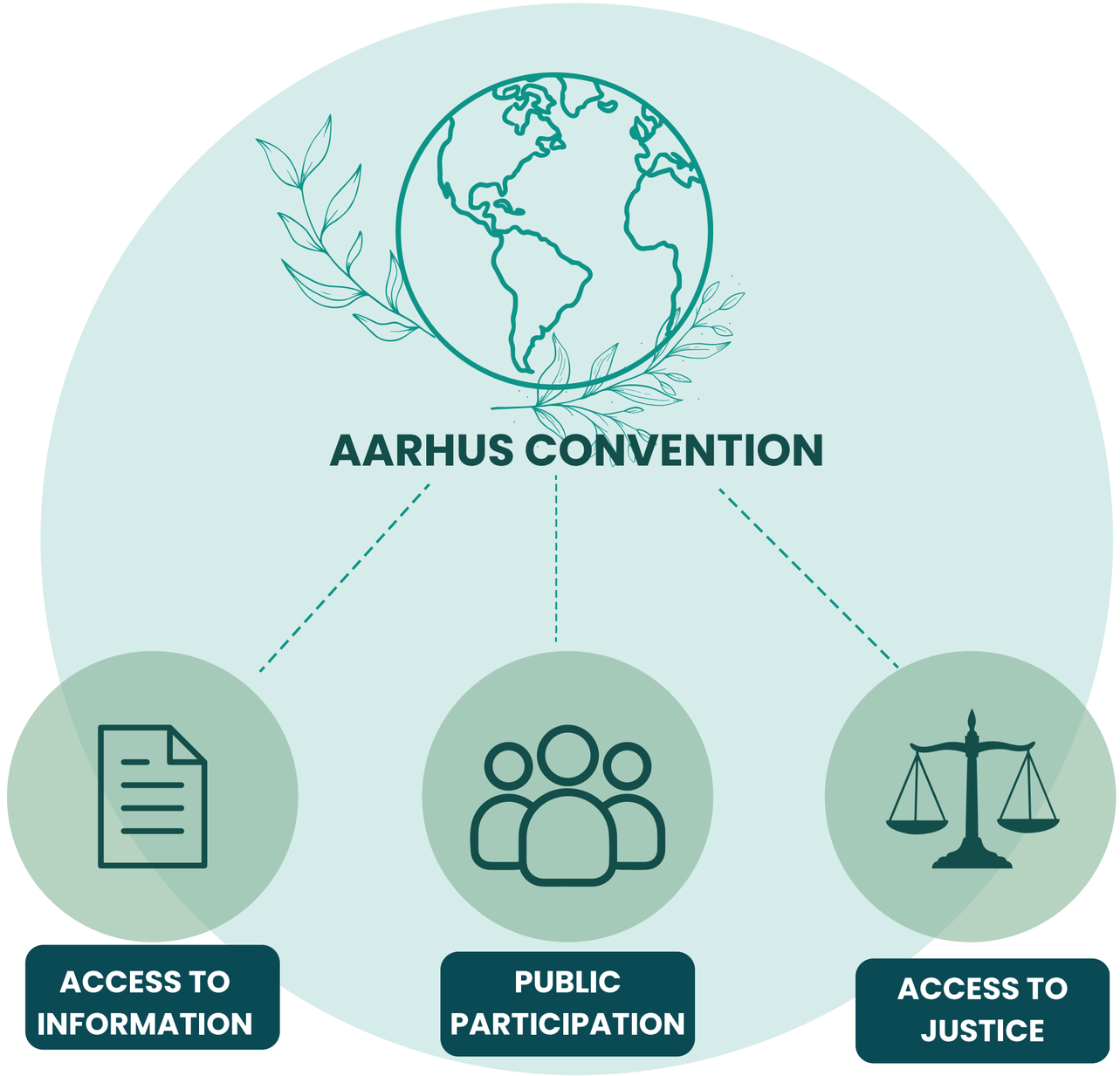
Aarhus Convention and Environmental Democracy

The international framework empowering citizens and environmental defenders to participate in environmental governance.



00

Title

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Title

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Questions & Answers

Clarifications and discussion on the legal frameworks for environmental defenders.



Coffee Break

Take a short break.
We'll resume in 10 minutes.



Interactive Activity

Apply the legal frameworks to practical scenarios and discuss possible responses for environmental defenders.



00

Title

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LOOKING AHEAD

Module 2

SLAPPs, Legal Risks & Practical Tools for Environmental Defenders

The next module will explore legal threats against environmental defenders and the tools available to protect civic space and environmental activism.

Date:
Time:



Local Trainings

National capacity-building trainings will be organised in **four partner countries.**



Italy

- Legal Input
- Communication Input
- Psychological Input



Germany

- Legal Input
- Communication Input
- Psychological Input



Greece

- Legal Input
- Communication Input
- Psychological Input



Hungary

- Legal Input
- Communication Input
- Psychological Input

Contact Us

We are happy to answer your questions and provide further information on the EnviRights project.



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Thank you!

THANK YOU

Thank you for your participation and
commitment to protecting environmental defenders.



Together, we protect

people and the planet.

7

The Three Pillars of Primary Law

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01

Introduction

T3.1 - D3.1

Module part of the EnviRightstrainingprogramme.

Strengthen Resilience

Goal: strengthen the resilience of environmental rights defenders across Europe.

Communication Skills

Focus on communication skills for activists and journalists working in the environmental field.

Storytelling Matters

Effective storytelling shapes public perception and drives meaningful change.

02

Media Landscape Today



- Digital revolution brings more channels and faster news cycles
- Challenges: infodemic, polarization, audience fragmentation
- Anyone can be a content producer; credibility varies widely
- Traditional media = authority and depth; social media = immediacy and reach

03

Framing: Choosing the Narrative

Framing is how issues are presented to the public. Words shape reality and emotional reactions.

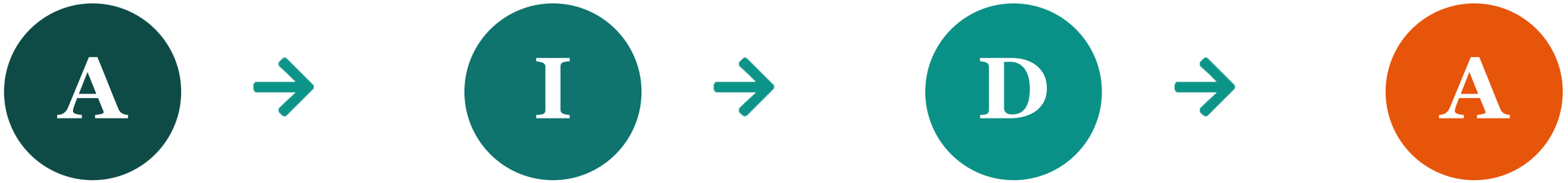
> *Words build bridges between communities and policy. The right frame turns an environmental crisis into a shared cause.*

Effective Environmental Framing

- Connect to shared values: health, future generations, justice
- Use rights-based language to anchor the discussion
- Highlight solutions, not just problems
- Avoid guilt and fear-based narratives

04

AIDA Communication Model



Attention

Catch the eye with a striking title, image, or opening line

Interest

Add context or a surprising fact to maintain engagement

Desire

Connect to audience values and emotions

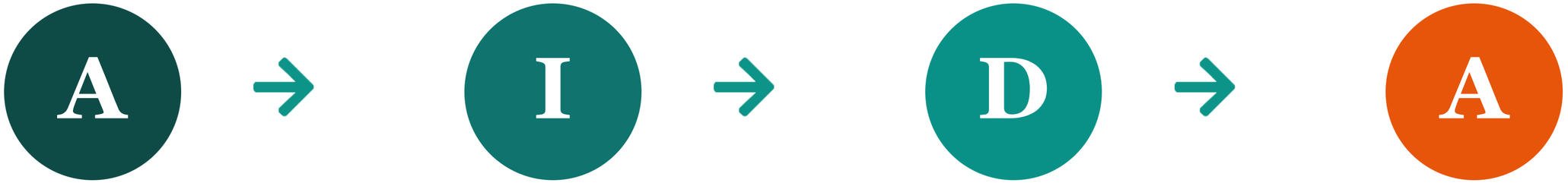
Action

Clear, accessible call-to-action (CTA)

Usage: Apply the AIDA model to speeches, social media posts, and press releases for maximum impact.

04

AIDA Communication Model



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07

Writing a Press Release

1

Title

Short, active, newsworthy headline that grabs attention

2

Subtitle

Adds context, supporting data, or a key angle

3

Lead (5Ws)

Who, What, When, Where, Why in the opening paragraph

4

Body

Context + authoritative sources (max 400-500 words)

5

Quotes

Attributed to spokespersons or recognized experts

6

Notes

Background information and press contacts

08

Interview & Media Training

Prepare Key Messages

Develop 3 main messages and return to them consistently throughout the interview.

Anticipate Questions

Rehearse tough questions with colleagues to build confidence and fluency.

Never Say 'No Comment'

Explain what can or cannot be discussed. Silence creates suspicion.

Bridging Technique

"That's an important point, but what matters here is..." —redirect to your message.

09

Language Matters

Words build bridges or walls. Frame climate issues as matters of health, rights, and fairness.

Harmful Term	Constructive Alternative	Why It Matters
Eco-terrorists	Environmental defenders	Removes criminalization
Climate alarmists	Climate advocates	Acknowledges legitimacy
Radical activists	Engaged citizens	Centers civic participation
Climate crisis	Health & rights issue	Makes it personal & relatable

Prefer constructive phrasing —stigmatizing labels close doors to dialogue and reinforce harmful stereotypes.

11

Digital Communication & Platforms

Instagram

Visuals, reels, stories

18-35

X / Twitter

Journalists & policymakers

Threads & updates

TikTok

Youth audience

Creative short videos

Facebook

Local communities

Mixed formats

YouTube

Long-form & livestreams

Education

LinkedIn

Institutional positioning

Professional

12

Content Strategy

Editorial Calendar

Aligncontentwithkeyevents: COP summits, global awareness days, local milestones.

Diversified Content

Mix informational posts, personal stories, calls-to-action, and behind-the-scenes content.

Visual Coherence

Maintain consistent colors, fonts, and templates across all platforms.

Smart Hashtags

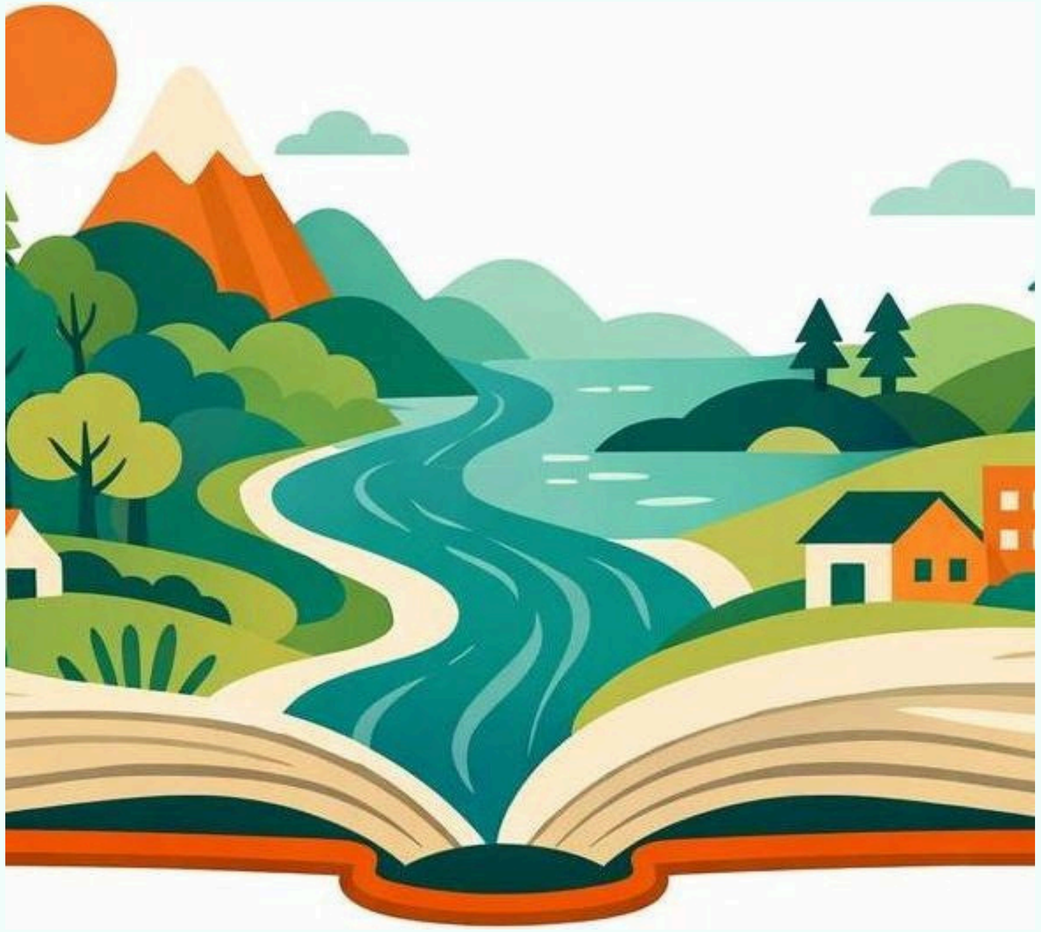
Use strategic hashtags and monitor trending conversations in your space.

Active Engagement

Comment, reply, and share. Build community through genuine two-way dialogue.

13

Storytelling for Environmental Rights



1. **Protagonist**
   Relatableperson or community
2. **Threat**
   Concrete problem (drought, pollution)
3. **Antagonist**
   System,policy, company —no demonization
4. **Transformation**
   Action, learning, resistance
5. **Call-to-Action**
   Whatthepubliccan do now

Ethics: consent, protection, verification, avoid victimization

14

Crisis & Risk Communication



Prevention > Outbreak > Acute Crisis > Resolution > Learning

- Respond quickly; silence = guilt in digital spaces
- Be transparent; acknowledge harm when present
- Empathy first, then facts
- One clear voice (designated spokesperson)
- Document harassment; don't feed trolls; know digital rights