

The Earth Charter Local Communities Summits

Earth Charter Community Initiatives, USA

Background

The Earth Charter Community Summits is a grassroots effort to bring people together in cities in the United States to make the Earth Charter's principles a reality in their lives and communities. It started from the "big dream" of its founder, Jan Roberts, and has expanded internationally in the last few years.

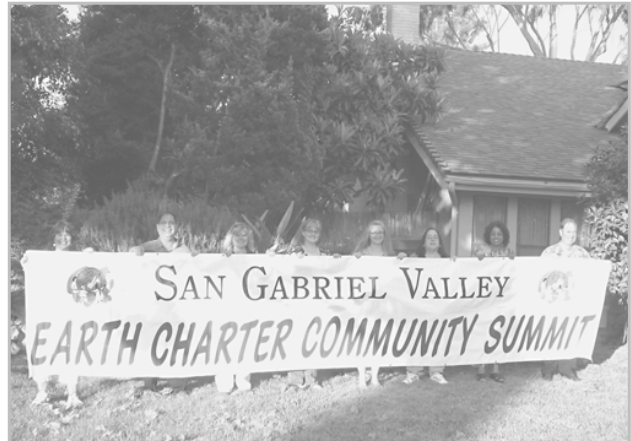
After Jan's first encounter with the Earth Charter in 1999, she decided to make it her quest to help people get inspired by the Earth Charter's "shimmering vision of hope and optimism". Since then, *Earth Charter USA Communities Initiatives, Inc.* (ECUSA CI) has grown out of the *Institute of Ethics and Meaning*, where it was functioning from, and has taken over coordinating the Summits. It has become the international organizer for the annual summits usually held in October each year.

Aim

The central aim of the Community Summits is to inform, educate and engage people of diverse backgrounds with the Earth Charter through music, arts, enlightened speakers and meaningful dialogues. The Summits also seek to mainstream the Earth Charter's holistic vision by reaching people who may not belong to organizations, but whose beliefs are aligned with the principles of the Earth Charter.

Participants

Summit organisers and participants are volunteers from diverse backgrounds who want



San Gabriel Valley Summit

to bring the Earth Charter to their hometowns. Generally, the participants are ordinary people who do not define themselves as activists and are of all ages and ethnicities.

Timeframe

The plan for the Earth Charter Community Summits was presented at the international launch of the Earth Charter in The Hague in June 2000 as a major grassroots initiative in the United States. The first annual Earth Charter Community Summits took place one year later, in September 2001. Since then, three additional Summits have taken place in 2002, 2003, and 2004, and the fourth was recently held on October 8, 2005.

Description

The Earth Charter Community Summits are open, public gatherings that focus on the Earth

Charter. They are dedicated to spawning multi-faceted grassroots efforts to implement the Earth Charter principles through individual action and local community policies and practices. The fact that the Summits are held simultaneously across the United States differentiates Earth Charter Community Summits from other Earth Charter action groups or gatherings. By using web-casting technology, participating communities can share Summit highlights and keynote speeches with other communities in real-time.

In addition to the web-broadcasts, Summits feature readings from the Earth Charter, keynote speeches by individuals who are familiar with the Earth Charter, interactive discussion groups, and panel discussions. Speakers include: activists, authors, political leaders, academics, founders of NGOs, and a wide array of other people. Dialogues take many forms at the Summits, including open space sessions on applying the Earth Charter in education, business, or in ones personal life. Most Community Summits have also included music and art. Artists and performers usually range from children to local celebrities.

Summit organizers are given freedom in the planning process out of the belief that each local organizer is in the best position to plan an event that will be meaningful for his or her particular

community. It is, however, required that the Summits be flexible so that they are open to everyone.

Funding

Most individual Summits have been supported through large in-kind donations. In-kind items have included space, printing, food, advertisements, equipment, and volunteer time. Individual Summits have also received financial support from NGOs and donors. For example, for the launch of the project in 2001, \$160,000 was raised to cover costs for the Tampa Summit and satellite broadcasting costs, so all cities could see one another. In 2004, the project's estimated in-kind budget raised was \$317,000 (not to mention the volunteers' time and effort).



Senegal Earth Charter local summit



*African group song at the New palts
(New York)*

Results

Fifty cities have organized Earth Charter Community Summits since 2001, and some cities have held one every year for four consecutive years. The participant levels of individual Summits have ranged from 100 to 1200 individuals. The 1st Earth Charter Summit in 2001 featured 12 cities. Since then, the

number of cities organizing Earth Charter Summits has risen to 24 in 2002, 33 in 2003, and 29 in 2004 and 2005.

The Earth Charter Community Summits have generated a wide range of outcomes that demonstrate not only their success in achieving the aim of informing, educating, and engaging people with the Earth Charter, but also their potential for spawning Earth Charter endorsements, projects, and initiatives. The Summits succeeded in their aim of mainstreaming the Earth Charter by attracting a total of approximately 41,600 participants, who generally were of all ages, ethnicities, and

backgrounds. Highlights from the Summits include:

- The endorsement of the Earth Charter by Seattle, Philadelphia, and Berkeley.
- An Earth Charter Eco-Tour to Costa Rica developed by a Boulder city Summit organizer in conjunction with the Sierra Club.
- The creation of Earth Scouts, a programme for children 3 to 15 years of age.
- The creation and launch of an Earth Charter CD by Raffi, an international children's singer.
- In addition, uncounted numbers of collaborations, events, and meetings were arranged and initiated through the Earth Charter Summits.



SGI panel on the community summits

Conclusion

The Earth Charter Community Summits project does not yet have national visibility or funding for its local initiatives. The organisers plan to build a board so that there are nationally known people who can help with both those goals. The aim is to fund local organizers in Summit cities so they can be free to work entirely for the Earth Charter. They also plan to fund the national office with full-time Director, Administrative person, Earth Scouts Coordinator and volunteer coordinator.

Although the project evaluation is generally a self-report by organizers on what is happening in their local Summit, it is appropriate to say that due to the efforts of grassroots organizers the Earth Charter is spreading into lesson plans in classrooms, local governmental policies and practices, university endeavours, youth activities, and other community activities throughout the USA.

This case was directly drawn from the following sources:

- Earth Charter Award Application by Jan Roberts
- <http://www.earthchartersummits.org/> consulted on September 15, 2005
- Earth Charter Annual Report 2002-03