

## Afterschool STEM Message Framing: Environmental Literacy

Our "[Ready, Set, FrameCheck!](#)" guide offers ideas for **how** to talk about issues so they resonate with a wide variety of audiences. There are six key points to keep in mind:

1. Lead with a shared value.
2. Avoid abstract language, words, or framing that reinforce unhelpful assumptions or preconceived notions people may have.
3. Identify a specific, local, or regional issue that you wish to discuss, and clearly explain what you mean.
4. Contextualize any numbers and data you provide.
5. Demonstrate how your program and the youth you serve want to learn about and find solutions to the issue to ensure your community thrives. Offer specific solutions and indicate a willingness to be collaborative.
6. And finally—use well-framed visuals.

How does this look in practice? Let's work through a couple of examples!

### EXAMPLE #1

Environmental challenges manifest in many different ways across the United States. In Utah, there is great concern that the Great Salt Lake will dry up in a few years without swift action. When talking with communities and policymakers about the need for environmental literacy as part of your afterschool STEM program, find common ground for connection (i.e., have conversations that resonate and stick). A sample message on this topic could read as follows:

#### **Step 1: Connect around the shared value of clean air in the community and describe it clearly**

The future of the Great Salt Lake is at a tipping point, and recent reports warn that without swift action, the Great Salt Lake could dry up within just a few years. This would release large amounts of toxins into the air, posing serious health consequences for our region. Dust from the exposed lakebed contains harmful substances such as arsenic and could worsen air quality, affecting families and children across our community.

## Step 2: Explain the specific consequences for the community

In addition to the health consequences for members of our community, there will be other impacts:

- **Wildlife and habitat loss:** The shrinking lake endangers countless birds and other species that rely on this ecosystem.
- **Economic impacts:** Industries such as outdoor recreation, mineral extraction, and agriculture all depend on a healthy lake, supporting jobs and livelihoods in our region.
- **Water supply and snowpack disruption:** The lake plays a key role in regional weather patterns and water cycles that support our communities and local businesses.

## Step 3: Explain how your program is a part of the solution

At my afterschool STEM program, we see an opportunity to help young people learn about this challenge and be part of the solution. By teaching students about water conservation, local ecosystems, problem-solving, and how STEM informs advocacy and education, we are preparing the next generation to care for our natural resources and contribute to smart, practical solutions.

For instance, youth apprentices in the [Spy Hop](#) afterschool program in Salt Lake City developed and launched a creative media campaign that is sparking action in response to the rapid decline of the Great Salt Lake. Using artistic storytelling to build awareness about the issue and convey science concepts, their pieces have been featured in the local newspaper and are on display at the local library.

## Step 4: End with a focus on reinforcing shared goals and a spirit of collaboration with the community

The future of the Great Salt Lake affects all of us. By acting now and by educating our youth, we can protect our community's health, economy, and environment for generations to come. We look forward to connecting you with the passionate youth in our program and working with you to address the challenges we face.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]  
[Your Afterschool Program Name]  
[Your Contact Information]

### Pro Tip:

*Use high-quality photos from your program to personalize your message.*

*Photo Credit: 50 Statewide Afterschool Network*



## EXAMPLE #2

In Bozeman, Montana, increasing frequency of natural hazards such as droughts and floods put communities and agriculture at risk.

### **Step 1: Connect around the shared value of mitigating natural hazards and describe it clearly**

Water shortages and changing runoff patterns at the headwaters of the Gallatin River put local residents and agricultural lands at risk. As the weather becomes warmer earlier in the year, the snowpack melts, and water is released too quickly, leaving little water available during the hotter, drier summer months.

### **Step 2: Explain the specific consequences for the community**

In addition to water scarcity for members of our community, there will be other impacts:

- **Agricultural loss:** Rapid snowpack melting can cause the river to flood and damage agricultural lands, while insufficient water during very dry months can reduce crop yields.
- **Economic impacts:** The region will be less resilient to wildfires and, consequently, will experience increased stress on the outdoor recreation industry.

### **Step 3: Explain how your program is a part of the solution**

At my afterschool STEM program, we see an opportunity to help young people learn about this challenge and be part of the solution. For instance, youth in our program designed and tested structures that could store snow and slowly release water, extending water availability into the drier months.

As part of the [RISE Challenge](#) project, students worked collaboratively with local scientists and landowners to test their ideas and even presented their findings to local agricultural leaders.

### **Step 4: End with a focus on reinforcing shared goals and a spirit of collaboration with the community**

The future of our watershed affects all of us. By acting now and by educating our youth, we can protect our community's health, economy, and environment for generations to come. We look forward to connecting you with the passionate youth in our program and working with you to address the challenges we face.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]  
[Your Afterschool Program Name]  
[Your Contact Information]

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*You can use these simple steps to paint a bigger picture and wider context for the issue you are raising (a "landscape") rather than focusing on individual stories (a "portrait"). See our ["Paint Landscapes, Not Portraits"](#) guide for more details on how to do this well, and use the [checklist](#) to make sure your narrative helps people see the systemic changes we need to make.*