

HEARTLAND

Illuminating Possibilities and Pathways
for Growing a Civil Rights Movement for
Future Generations

&

HEADWATERS

2014 Women's Congress for Future Generations

The water on Earth today is the same body of water on Earth when it formed billions of years ago. It moves above, below and through the Earth, changing form and exchanging energy with its surrounding environment. This water body – both constant and metamorphic – contains our heritage and our future; it is our great ancestor as well as the essential lifeblood of future generations of all life systems. Some say the whale's song is getting louder because it needs to permeate the pollutants and toxins in the waters. How loud can we make our song?

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Story

Ilene Evans, story teller and civil rights historian with Voices from the Earth, tells about the time after the Civil War

When women were unable to vote or own property. They had little political power. At a time when the nation was still ambivalent about freedom, women were unequivocal. They controlled the kitchen and the dinner table. Every child at their table had the right to live, grow, and be whole people. Then as now, we can see now that the very soul of the nation was being determined in every lowly domestic environ. Looking back, somehow they knew the soul of the nation was at stake after the War. They knew that a child needed to eat regardless of their color and skin tone, regardless of who their father was. Ilene said that the time has come again. The soul of the nation is at stake. The Earth is in peril, facing threats like climate change, unparalleled in human history. Women are moving into place, joining their voices together to claim a wholesome future for their children and grandchildren.

The environmental movement has been no different than any other social sphere: women are missing from places of leadership. Just like journalism or academia or the U.S. Senate, a majority of the leaders and spokespeople are men. Where are the women? What difference would women make in the movement?

The underlying message to women about helping solve any environmental problem from toxic chemicals to climate change is to shop. Use your dollars to change the market place. Mothers become the de facto replacement for regulation when they have to screen every purchase for toxic chemicals. Sandra Steingraber, the renowned writer and biologist in the tradition of Rachel Carson, said about raising her children "I am not a HEPA filter. I can't place my body between all of these hormonally active chemicals in the environment and my children. That is what government is tasked to do — to help protect us from things that we can't protect ourselves from." Women, as the major household managers, were to buy organic food to reduce children's exposures to pesticides and to help shift industrial agriculture to a more sustainable footing.

In September of 2012, a group of women convened the Women's Congress for Future Generations to lift up women's voices, thinking and actions. We gathered together not because we were demanding equal time but because women have unique responsibilities for future generations and the world around them; women are the first environment. It was not enough to be told to shop our way out of the climate crisis or the environmental health problems. We knew that women brought wisdom, the capacity to think and find new approaches. We could map a path to a different future than the gray, overheated, polluted future that seems to lie ahead. We could claim the soul of the nation.

Two months later, three First Nations women and one non-native ally convened Idle No More, a call on all people to honor Indigenous sovereignty and to protect the air, land, water and all creation for future generations. One year later, in September of 2013, another group of women gathered in New York for a summit convened by the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN). The premise of the summit was that women around the world would be most affected by climate change and women were key to the most important solutions. At both the Women's Congress and WECAN'S summit, the women released Declarations. Similar Declarations have been drafted over the years from groups like the Northern California Circle of the Women's Congress, the Bay Area Rights of Nature Alliance, and the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature. These Declarations have a lot in common; all are staking out an intellectual territory on policy and all are committing to action. The work is possible: Bolivian law now includes the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth.

Now, a second Women's Congress for Future Generations in Minneapolis, where we set our gaze on the economic issues that lie at the heart of both environmental issues and women's issues. The Midwest offers a unique ethos, a wellspring of innovation, and a history of care for the commonwealth and common health: the marriage of the Heartland with the Headwaters. This Congress is but one conversation in a continuum — one that we wish to deepen . . .

Confluence

... Conversations about Future Generations preceded this Congress, and there are important conversations going on in parallel.

None of this work is ours alone, but borne out of and shaped by ancient headwaters, complex histories, and the abounding work already underway. Women are doing unique and powerful work around the world and in this country. We are joining this current and offering our unique wisdom. We endeavor to participate in the movement while also cracking open spaces for raising up, listening to, and reflecting on the experiences of others.

*Our goal is to ignite with other kindred organizations and efforts a **civil rights movement for future generations**, by:*

building a network of activists into local and regional powerhouses,

innovating around governance through law and policy,

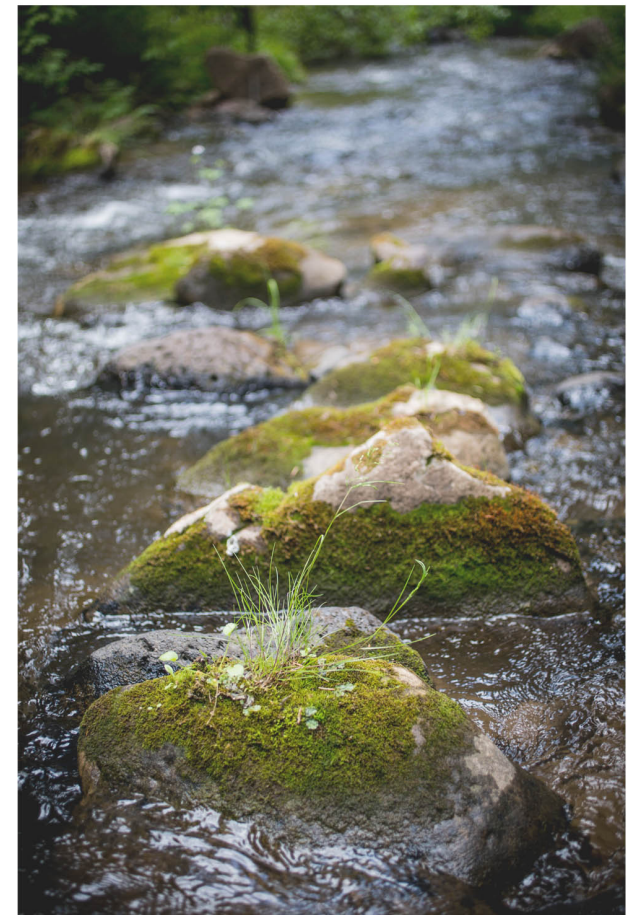
and co-creating platforms to stay connected and support one another in this work.

There is no single source that can provide the answer for how to find each other and connect in meaningful ways, and no single action that will bring the change we seek. We won't have answers today, but we have begun the deep analysis necessary to open up possibilities and pathways.

At the heart of this plan are strategies for addressing any issue at any level, and the challenges ahead. This document is not an action plan and does not contain traditional 'next steps'. Next steps typically prescribe coordinator roles and people being "coordinated". Instead, our 'next steps' take inspiration and point of departure from an exercise imagined by Robert Lovelace of the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation: **an exchange based on needs and offerings**.

Described in the next pages are blueprints for engagement in **organizing, innovating, and connecting**. In these pages we seek to layout possible pathways for fostering **co-creation** of knowledge and **co-leadership** of strategies based on communion with each other and with the Earth.

We converge today around withdrawing our consent to a toxic future and igniting women's voices and leadership to address the challenges before us. We recognize the strong current of work already being carried forward by the wisdom of other circles of women who are not present. Our offerings are open-ended. Over time we will learn what works and what doesn't, for whom, and why by comparing the relative strengths and weaknesses of our collective experiences. Our hope is that we play a role in transforming **public dialogue** and **collective action** to ensure that those who come after us inherit a just and livable future.



When up against obstacles, water flows around the obstruction, erodes it away, or water moves the obstacles with its power. A single drop of water has so much more power when it joins with others.

Blueprint 1: Organizing



One of the ideas being tested in the Women's Congress is that our power is actually sourced from communion with each other and with the Earth.

One expression of that idea at the community level is making common cause with people in your community to support each other in addressing the grief and anger around environmental matters. A **Future First Field Guide (FFFG)** is at the heart of this work. The guide is a **bridge between concern and action** and can be applied to any issue in a community.

The FFFG materials support learning, awareness, and a foundation of concepts to support a group coming together and asking questions like:

- How do I withdraw my consent, and how do I give my consent?
- What are my roles and responsibilities, and what are the roles and responsibilities of the decision-makers involved in the issue I am concerned about?
- What practiced or emergent language can I use to communicate rights and responsibilities to the decision-makers in my community?

The experiment is exploring the effectiveness of these guides in bridging concern with action. The guides usher in a space to:

- Identify the threats in your community that you want to tackle together.
- Find new language and ways of expressing consent.
- Wrestle with the hard questions and find answers together.
- Become Guardians of Future Generations.
- Become a moral force.
- Create a form of power based on communion to assert where you withhold consent and to what.

These guides are available online and printable. These will be interactive in the months following this Congress. They are intended to infuse people in the streets with points of leverage, as well as those people who may not be able to join in traditional forms of protest but who wish to withdraw their consent in other ways.

Blueprint 2: Innovating

A parallel component to community organizing is **innovating around governance through law and policy**. Pundits and politicians seem to think that our government's primary responsibility is to foster the economy. The sole focus on private property and the free market are failed theories of government and we are familiar with the reasons for these failures.

Emerging legal and policy ideas have the potential to enlarge the concept of democracy, empower communities and provide guidance on smart decision-making when faced with economic proposals. The great advances in law over history have been the expansion of rights, whether it is women's right to vote, the abolition of slavery or the declaration of human rights.

At the heart of this blueprint is the explicit **recognition of the rights of future generations** to a healthy and livable Earth, and a call to **institute the practical means for honoring those rights** through state and federal policy, legal frameworks, and new institutions.

Conversations about innovating around the law and future generations preceded this Congress, and there are important conversations going on in parallel. One proposal, borne out of the momentum following the 2012 Women's Congress in Moab, Utah, is to:

- Approach the First Lady to **convene a National Commission** to explore the Rights of Future Generations to a healthy and livable environment and the mechanisms for fulfilling present generations' responsibilities to them. The results would be used to guide the First Lady's work internationally at the United Nations and as a plan for the President and Congress to institute domestic measures to protect the interests of Future Generations.

Conversations amongst this year's organizers about innovating around governance through law and policy produced a call to "think bigger!" and the resulting proposal to:

- Initiate in all 50 states the **amendment of state constitutions** to recognize the rights of future generations and to adopt statutes in every jurisdiction that fulfills our responsibilities to them. Pilot communities could serve as models for states and other nation states. Minnesota could serve as the first pilot community.

These proposals remain open-ended as we continue the process of braiding together partnerships and resources that will carry these actions into real political discourse.

A fractal web of partnerships is critical.

At a time when civil society is more and more excluded from vital debates, the connection between deleterious industries, politicians and law enforcement is becoming tighter and tighter. Community efforts are consistently met with apathy, coercion and disrespect from people in positions of power and decision-making. The forceful currents pushing against this work make it difficult and emotional, yet the personal toll of this work is not often discussed.



We seek first to erode isolation: you are not alone in this work, you have a support network.

Although the event is an important focalizing opportunity and call to action, it is equally important that we envision concrete pathways for the work to take shape post conference. Movement partners are required to grow a civil rights movement for future generations. We envision not just non-profit partners, but also association and constituent partners as well as individuals who are new paradigm innovators to be key to the work going forward.

To create space and pathways for exchange:

- We are going to search for ways to connect movement partners, share strength, and support each other's work.
- We will seek ways to support each other in the personal toll that this work brings.
- We will connect individual members through monthly calls*, gatherings**, or other creative mechanisms we will come up with together.
- We will foster and encourage other groups to host events around the country using the Women's Congress as a platform and template.
- We will inspire innovative, impactful actions in the here and now!

*A monthly open conference call will serve as one platform for staying connected. In the months following the event we will delve deeper into the FFFG and organizing blueprints. Over time the calls will develop into a platform for the expanding number of participants to stay connected, co-create points of intervention, and foster emergent leadership. Collaboration will turn into a team of individuals who can take their work forward on their own. **The first of these Monthly Briefings will be Thursday January 22, 2014.**

**Check the Future First website immediately following the 2014 Women's Congress for upcoming events at the local level: futurefirst.us