

## The World Energy Community Action Network

The popular mantra for the climate movement “Think Global, Act Local” has been realized through amazing growth of community action. Across America and the world, innovators are constructing solutions to sustainability that will save us greenhouse gas emissions, energy and money if taken to scale. Unfortunately, these initiatives rarely make it past the local level unless the press, an author, or a funder hears about the work. Today’s decentralized, undirected, and detached sprouting of sustainability solutions will not result in significant changes at the rate they are needed unless we work together to connect and communicate.

### **WeCAN and the Climate Movement**

Unlike previous social movements, the youth climate movement has an incredible communication tool at its hands – the internet. Yet as a movement, we are currently not utilizing the full potential of the internet to increase the efficiency of communication between individuals and groups. In order to do this, students at Macalester College and the University of Minnesota have envisioned and created the World Energy Community Action Network, or WeCAN. (<http://www.wecannetwork.org>) WeCAN is a social networking site, not unlike Facebook, that is built with the goal of cultivating the climate movement. But WeCAN is more than another social networking website – it’s a different way of effectively corresponding, communicating, and collaborating with those around us.

### **Our Philosophy**

The philosophy behind WeCAN is perhaps as important as the site itself. “We can” is an affirmative, positive statement, which is manifested throughout the website. “We” must include everyone, because only a large and diverse movement will produce just, positive, effective, and interconnected solutions. Recognizing the power of diversity, the website is open to any number of groups and individuals and allowing contributions from anyone. “Can” distinguishes our new movement of action rather than advocacy, the acknowledgement of our agency and empowerment, and our roles as actors and stakeholders. We can be global warming solutions.

### **Structure and Features**

A number of WeCAN’s features embody our philosophy and set it apart from other social networking attempts. WeCAN’s mission is to facilitate real relationships between

individuals and further empowering groups. While current approaches are person-centric, focusing on individual embellishment and action, WeCAN is people-centric, providing the resources for a movement.

A number of structural features set WeCAN apart from the rest. WeCAN will facilitate better communication between people by dividing groups into three categories – regional groups that foster close geographic contact and strong networking, working groups that promote specific projects and ideas, and affinity groups that connect subcultures (students, labor, nonprofits). WeCAN will further increase efficiency by connecting groups and resources through an open tagging system, creating the ability to tag an item for your group. Different subsets of groups will further integrate (e.g. Twin Cities subset of Midwest regional group). Resources can be everything from videos and media to documents and outside sources; these resources will be amalgamated in a dynamic resource library for each group. Anyone can tag a resource or add it to his or her group's library with ease. Open forums will provide avenues for discussions, both within and across groups. Skillshares will help us educate ourselves in specific skills needed to change the world. Individual profiles have plenty of information and serve as resource and contact nodes for an individual's access to groups, pictures, and events. Like the projects it supports, WeCAN has been built from the bottom-up, with open source technology and creativity, relying on the people it supports to change it as needed.

WeCAN is certainly not perfect – the website needs a facelift, and a number of features are not connected as well as they could be or do not exist at this time. However, after a year and a half of visioning and construction, we have a clear sense of what WeCAN can be and do. The climate movement must begin to take its actions to the next level with a presidential election, new policymakers, and crucial international agreements coming in the next few years. We must be ready to show that anything is possible and change what's politically and socially feasible. We must be able to effectively and justly share our knowledge. And we can.