



Youth Advocates *for* Community Health GUIDEBOOK



A youth participatory action research approach to SNAP-Ed policy, systems, and environmental change efforts



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

“ If young people like the ones I met in this group can find their way into leadership positions, this world may just have a shot [at] being the inclusive place most of us wish it to be. You can't just wish and pray, though. You have to work. This group felt like they were ready to work, and it was an honor to spend my time with them.”

—Robert Halstead
WILLY STREET CO-OP

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Next, many Extension educators across nutrition, youth development, and community development programs facilitated local youth teams through the processes outlined in this guidebook. Educators provided feedback on their experiences working with teams that are the foundation of this guide.



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Introduction

Welcome to the Youth Advocates for Community Health (YACH) Guidebook!

This project began from an awareness that the **policy, systems, and environmental** (PSE) change work happening nationally is frequently missing some very important voices. Young people under the age of 18 years are frequently held both vulnerable and powerless when policies, systems, and environmental factors impact healthy living for the youth and their families. Because youth are rarely engaged in the process of solving issues that affect their lives, the lack of youth voice prevents PSE work from achieving the greatest impact. However, youth who are empowered to be leaders bring creative ideas, break down real and perceived barriers, and generate energy among their peers and adults.

PSE changes seek to “make the healthy choice the easy choice” by changing factors that influence food choices and diet quality.

YPAR is a specialized form of community-based participatory research that promotes the influence of young people in systems and communities.

The adults who work in community health and youth development must intentionally create opportunities for youth voice. **Youth participatory action research** (YPAR) is a framework that supports this intention while also working towards several important goals. Through this guidebook, we hope to:

- ▶ Provide adults with the tools to implement effective YPAR.
- ▶ Support a process by which young people identify an issue, enhance their awareness of how communities work, and discover their unique, local niche to address the issue.
- ▶ Build leadership skills among youth, increasing their competence and confidence to address community health issues at a PSE level.
- ▶ Enhance the impact of PSE work through engagement of young people.

This guidebook was written based on the experience of four University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension educators leading a YPAR project with funding support from the United States Department of Agriculture’s program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed).

Therefore, the community health issues of focus and projects described as examples are limited to those related to food systems and physical activity. However, the resources and guidelines included herein may be applicable to issues extending from school nutrition to housing to substance abuse to violence. The two pilot counties—Dane (urban) and Jackson (rural)—demonstrate that youth-led YPAR can work well in any size community.

The 5 Steps of Action are the foundation of the YACH-YPAR framework. Together, these five steps create an outline for a successful project. The steps were shared with the YACH project leadership team in the summer of 2017 at the pilot YPAR kickoff training by Sharlen Moore, Co-Founder and Director of **Urban Underground** in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. On that day, ten youth and three adults from two Wisconsin counties learned about Urban Underground’s mission to promote “the next generation of leaders committed to building safe and sustainable communities.” The organization advances their mission “through youth-led social justice campaigns in the areas of health, education, public safety, and juvenile justice reform.” All who attended that one-day training were inspired by Urban Underground’s guiding philosophy for their work with young people, “nothing about us without us.”

Choose your battle

Youth start by identifying the issues they are passionate to make people aware of. In this step, they explore how an issue affects them and others, who their allies are in raising awareness, and how they can motivate their peers.

Raise awareness and engage others

After identifying their issue, youth actively search out other supporters, learn effective ways to communicate about their chosen issue, and think creatively about how they will increase awareness in the designated community.

Make an action plan

This is a time for youth to listen and explore ideas, consider the pros and cons of different approaches, learn about and practice compromise, and get creative about possible actions they could take to address the issue.

Implement your plan

Whether the youth have decided to organize an event, hold a sit-in, share an educational video, or any of a wide variety of possible actions, it is time to put their plan into motion. This is the time to take action.

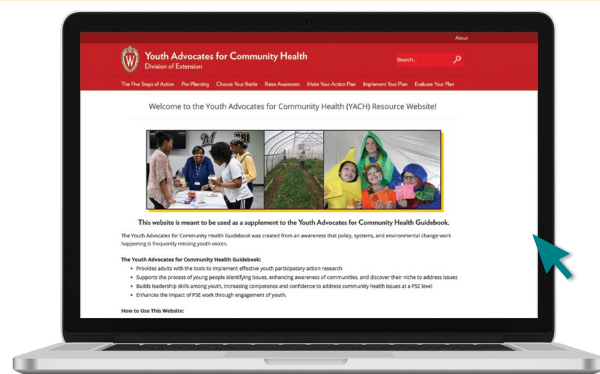
Evaluate your plan

Reflection must follow action to ensure that the youth assess their successes and areas that could have gone better, learn from their experience, and be able to apply what they've learned to future efforts. Evaluation happens throughout these five steps.



This guidebook uses these five steps as a logical and effective framework for how to engage young people in designing and implementing thoughtful action that addresses community health issues affecting them. In addition to the five steps, we encourage adults using this guidebook to recognize the importance of the sections on team building activities and pre-planning—vital components of building cohesion, comfort, and confidence among youth participants. You will also find a [supplemental website](#) containing resources linked in this guidebook or that are useful throughout the span of your project.

We encourage you to dive in, explore the guidebook, and take on the challenges and rewards of engaging young people in participatory action research.



Thank you in advance for your decision to welcome youth to the table and support them in maximizing their voices.

Sincerely,

The YACH Development Team

How to use this guidebook

The pages of this guide contain a lot of information. It might seem difficult to know where to start or what to do next. The group of youth leaders may be forming for the first time or maybe they have been working together for some time. So, the question of where to begin is even more challenging. Youth participatory action research rarely follows a straight or consistent path.

So, we recommend this...

Start here

The **preplanning activities** are foundational, focusing on project parameters and expectations, ground rules, defining the community to be served, and identifying strengths of team members. Engage the youth in the activities, recognizing that the time needed to complete them may vary for different groups. Be patient with yourselves and with the process.

Plan ahead

How will you **empower youth in youth-led action research**? The youth engaged in this project are young leaders of your community. Treat them as colleagues who may need additional support and guidance during the process.

Move forward

When you are ready, move on to **choose your battle** with community mapping. If the youth think they know their community, encourage them to take another look from a new perspective.

One step at a time

Trust the process! As the group finishes each step, the next step will present itself. At the beginning of each section of the guidebook is a list of crucial questions the youth must be able to answer completely by the end of that section. At the end, an evaluation checkpoint guides the youth through a self-assessment to make sure they are ready to move on to the next step. This resource acts as a flexible guide rather than a strict one-size-fits-all formula.

Begin again

When the group has successfully implemented their project, final evaluation frequently opens new learning and next steps, ultimately leading them back to the beginning and possibly choosing a new battle.



Check for this icon throughout the guide for **youth action activities**.



Check for this icon throughout the guide for **team-building activities**.

5 Steps of Action—a nonlinear process

The 5 Steps of Action, as they have been described so far, may seem like a step-by-step process that happens in order from start to finish. In the real world, the different parts of the process work together in a variety of ways. For example:

- ▶ Activities in the preplanning, battle-choosing (step 1), and awareness-raising (step 2) sections helps youth form ideas needed to make an action plan (step 3).
- ▶ When and if things don't go according to plan during implementation (step 4), groups may need to go back and dig deeper into their battle and awareness raising efforts from step 1 and step 2.

- ▶ Finally, evaluation is shown as step 5, but it really happens throughout the project. Evaluation helps groups stay on track and achieve their goals at every step.

The graphic below illustrates these ideas to show how a seemingly linear process truly functions within a real project. The good news for groups of youth is that they can focus on what is most needed, using the 5 Steps and this book as a guide rather than a strict set of rules to follow.

Note: The below graphic is available as a full-page handout on [page 73](#).



Start with the end in mind— action planning

As the 5 Steps of Action graphic shows, activities from the early phases of the process feed into the Make an Action Plan step. Knowing what the end goal is—to have a fully functioning action plan that they can implement as smoothly as possible—will help them feel invested in the process along the way. Also, by the time they are ready to make an action plan, the work will already be half complete. So, early in the pre-planning, we recommend sharing with them:

1. The action plan template provided in the resources at the back of this guide.
2. The graphic on page 6, which shows how their work over the coming weeks, will help them develop a plan.
3. The fill-enabled version of the action plan template (available at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach) so they can fill in the appropriate parts as they go along.

Evaluation—project checkpoints

As the earlier graphic for the 5 Steps of Action suggests, evaluation happens throughout a project, and is not something that only happens at the end of a project. Evaluation is really a way of asking, “How do we know we’ve been successful *so far*?” and discovering answers to that question. The way youth gather those answers depends on the project, who they’re asking, and what resources they have available.

They should be asking “How do we know...?” throughout the entire process, using the crucial questions at the beginning of each step and checkpoints at the end of each step as guides. Each checkpoint (the last page of each section of the *YACH Guidebook*) includes the following elements, which are all different perspectives on “How do we know...?”.

1. Youth project self-assessment

The **crucial questions** provided on the first page of each section help the youth understand what they are working toward. The questions are repeated at the end as a self-check, creating bookends to ensure they have accomplished what they set out to do.

2. Personal reflection

The **personal reflection** box encourages everyone to take a few moments to look back on the activities of that section and think about what they have learned as individuals, what skills they have gained, and what positive risks they have taken during the experience. Reflection of this kind ensures that youth realize they benefit personally even as they work toward the benefit of the community.

3. A formal (but fun) evaluation activity

Formal evaluation activities more closely represent what most people think of when they hear the word, evaluation. Evaluation activities suggest one or more structured tools to help answer the question, “How do we know we’ve been successful so far in moving toward our identified goal(s)?”

4. Celebration

Small celebrations of accomplishments at each phase of the project help re-energize the group, recognize strengths and achievements no matter how small, and help the group realize how far they have come no matter how far they still have to go. So, do not be afraid to ask, “What do we have to celebrate today?”

At each checkpoint, youth are not required to go through all four types of evaluation. The **youth self-assessment** and **formal activity** are most strongly encouraged. However, each type has a specialized purpose and is beneficial.

Reflection and celebration should always be brief. For example, reflection can happen verbally in a group, be journaled individually, emailed from a home computer, or submitted through a Google Form. It is always a good use of time to take 20 minutes (or whatever time period is appropriate) to celebrate accomplishments or obstacles that have been overcome.

Start with the end in mind—action planning

A fillable version of the action plan template is available at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach.

PRE-PLANNING
Define community

CHOOSE YOUR BATTLE
What's in a community? or
Dimensions of a community

CHOOSE YOUR BATTLE
Identity issues and assets
in your community

CHOOSE YOUR BATTLE
Narrow it down to
one issue in the youth niche

MAKE AN ACTION PLAN
S.M.A.R.T. model
of goal setting

CHOOSE YOUR BATTLE
Identify partners
Youth may also keep notes
here about any ideas or items
they don't want to forget.

SITUATION						
Initiative title						
Start and end dates						
Community	What community will this project serve? How are you defining that community?					
Community assets	What is special about your community? What is it important to you that people living your community are healthy and well? Who are your allies?					
Initiative goal(s) statement	What does the initiative hope to achieve, overall? What is the youth niche in this issue? What will youth contribute to this effort that no adult has or could do?					
What do you want to achieve? (S.M.A.R.T. goals)						
Notes? (Money, staff, partners, volunteers, supplies)	When you're gathering information about your community, issue, and actions, you may want to record notes here that don't have a "home" or use to you yet.					

ACTION PLAN					
Activities you will do to achieve your goal	Team member(s) responsible	Resources needed (money, staff, volunteers, supplies)	Deadline (When will you complete the activity?)	Outcomes (short-, medium-, or long-term)	Evaluation (How will you measure short- or medium- term outcomes?)
S.M.A.R.T. goal 1:					
S.M.A.R.T. goal 2:					
S.M.A.R.T. goal 3:					

MAKE AN ACTION PLAN
Depending on what activities
were completed, theyouth may
draw from the Ripple Mapping
activity or earlier brainstorming.
Each activity that supports a
S.M.A.R.T. goal should include
planning elements in each box
of the row to ensure a strong,
effective plan.

EVALUATE YOUR PLAN
Plan for formal evaluation.

Re-list S.M.A.R.T. goals

Pre-planning

WORKING WITH YOUTH PARTNERS: EARLY IN THE PARTNERSHIP

Before beginning a collaboration with young people, we must lay the groundwork. Eager to start a project and take advantage of the energy and enthusiasm of the group, we tend to skip pre-planning steps. However, building strong foundations will help us avoid issues that can derail youths' best efforts later. These foundations fall into two categories:

- **Strategies for leading youth-adult partnerships**
- **Preplanning activities**

Partnerships between youth and adults have individual benefits for all participants, but also have larger impacts on the community in which these relationships exist. In this project, youth-adult partnerships form between youth leaders, adult staff, and community stakeholders. Facilitating these relationships may not be intuitive. Engaged youth members are living in a challenging and confusing chapter of their lives. Developing a relationship that is comfortable, empowering, and respectful of boundaries requires finesse, patience, and thoughtfulness. For adults, forging relationships between youth members and community partners can be a new and challenging way of thinking and facilitating change in the community.

Pre-planning establishes clear expectations about group behavior and roles among youth and adult partners. It is a chance to define the community the effort will serve. The community may be pre-defined by funding or partnerships or may seem obvious to the engaged youth and adults. Still, clarifying boundaries on a map or identifying characteristics of a portion of the population develops a common understanding of who is being served by the project.

The following sections include four activities that guide adult partners in establishing ground rules and expected outcomes. Suggested team-building activities correspond to group dynamic and developmental stages. Some activities may be important for your group. Others may work toward outcomes that do not fit your group; feel free to skip those activities. *As a group leader and facilitator, make choices about which activities to use or not use depending on the usefulness and expected benefits for your group.*



Strategies for leading youth-adult partnerships

Planning as an active and interactive process

Several early planning and researching stages in a youth participatory action research project seem to lend themselves to solitary work and/or lengthy discussions. With their energy and enthusiasm, youth may be eager to skip ahead to the “action” part of the project. Therefore, another key role of the adults in the group is to make planning processes as active and interactive as possible.

A few examples include:

- ▶ Incorporating a walk around the neighborhood in the community mapping process.
- ▶ Using opinion lines (where young people stand along a line at a point that corresponds with their opinion) to support discussion about important issues.
- ▶ Encouraging youth to go out into the community and talk directly with people about the issues.

It can sometimes take more time and effort to build interactive, hands-on strategies into planning steps, but any efforts to make activities engaging are not wasted. The more engaged the youth are, the more success you will all experience together.

Empowering youth to lead

As we work with young people, adults may feel and act as though we must know the answers. However, if we really did have them, the problems would be solved by now, all voices would be heard, and everyone would feel satisfied with solutions. By empowering youth to lead in situations where traditionally they have not been welcomed, we create space for them to explore, develop ideas, add their voices to the conversation, and identify their niche.

Intentional work creates this space for young people. We can look at empowering youth to lead in two complementary ways:

3 ingredients of youth empowerment

(Ledford, M. K. et al. 2013)

- ▶ **Skills development**
Intentionally strengthen key skills and knowledge for better decision-making, positive peer interactions, and strategic community advocacy.
- ▶ **Critical awareness**
Work with young people to identify information and resources they need to look at issues and strategize how to be community change agents.
- ▶ **Provide opportunities**
Create platforms for young people to apply and practice decision-making, participation, and taking action, which can result in community change.

What effective adult leaders do that empower youth (Huebner, A. J. 1998)

- ▶ **Share information transparently**
Treat youth as smart and capable, and they will be. Openly share budgets, important forms, project parameters, planning steps, etc.
- ▶ **Create autonomy through boundaries**
Rather than allowing youth to do whatever they want, give them a framework to work within, including responsibilities and tasks to be completed. Give them freedom and support within that framework.

- ▶ **Regularly examine your role as a professional**
Your experience implementing policy, systems, and environment interventions is valuable. However, your role in this setting is to facilitate youth work (through the process and the development of youth competencies) rather than making sure the project is perfect.

Team-building activities

It may be tempting to skip the team building activities when we meet with youth. The activities may seem silly or time consuming. They may not seem to serve a purpose at all. ***Please do not skip the team-building activities!*** These seemingly simple activities serve many purposes and can be an integral part of any meeting—from developing leadership skills to building trust and generating creative energy or thinking.

That said, team-building activities can and should be determined based on the needs of the group, the size of the group, and where the group is meeting. In short, how you use team builders is up to you, as the adult facilitator. Increasing cohesion and sense of community among youth and adults is key to easing the group through the stages of group development. Getting to know one another on a deeper level—both personally and within the project—is vital to successful collaboration. Which team builders you use to support those goals is up to you.

In this section, we will explore the stages of group development and how team builders can help groups in each stage with creativity, energy, and fun.



The importance of team-builders and reflection questions.

Team-building activities happen at the beginning of a session and help <i>group members</i> to:	Reflection questions happen at the end of a session or activity and help <i>group members</i> to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Get to know one another ▶ Build and practice skills ▶ Get participants thinking outside the box ▶ Explore new and interesting ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Solidify, deepen, and apply their learning in new ways ▶ Consider what occurred during the activity, how they thought and felt about it, and what it means to other areas of their lives
<p>These activities help <i>group leaders</i> by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Acting as transitions and warm-ups to other program activities ▶ Adding value to any group development process when used well. ▶ Presenting a low-pressure, creative challenge to overcome, an important step to engaging older adolescents. <p>If an activity works well, replicate it and apply it to a later experience. If an activity does not work, ask yourself <i>why</i> and adapt.</p>	<p>These activities help <i>group leaders</i> by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Offering brief open-ended questions to get youth participants thinking ▶ Taking very little time ▶ Providing feedback to ensure youth understood the concepts in the activity <p>Follow every activity with processing questions, whether you use the suggested questions or create your own.</p>

Team-building activities and the stages of group development

On occasion, groups of people come together around a task and work smoothly together right away. This is rare. More often, it takes intentional work to support a group in coming together, going through growing pains, becoming a successful team, and completing the task.

Educational psychologist Bruce Tuckman conducted research into group dynamics and described the five stages of group development, which can serve as a useful framework for how to effectively use team builders in group settings. The stages outlined by Tuckman included Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning (Smith, M. K. 2005).

The stages do not always flow in a linear fashion. Sometimes a major change in the group or its activities can lead to what may feel like a backward step in the stages of development. However, this shift in development is merely a necessary step in that group's progress. Team-building activities can help to gradually shape the relationships on which each stage is built.

In the pages that follow, you will find a brief description of each stage of group development as well as a series of possible team-building activities that can support the group in that stage. At the end of the stages, a short list of additional resources for team builders is provided.

Forming stage

In the forming stage, group members get to know one another—their strengths, challenges, and interests. They test the boundaries and expectations of the task they are to perform. The members also begin relying upon one another, their leader(s), and the standards they are being held to. Starting with a positive forming stage can ease some of the challenges of the storming stage, which comes next.

Implications for youth

It is normal for young people to feel apprehensive or even anxious in the forming stage. Uncertain about expectations or the workings of the group, they may have questions about appropriateness of behavior. They may be quiet or rely heavily on polite communication. This is not typically a productive time for the group, rather a time for establishing clear expectations, building relationships, and empowering youth.

Forming stage team-building activities



Who's in the bag?

Give each student a brown paper bag and tell them that for homework they should put five objects in the bag that represent themselves and make them unique. The next time the group meets, have students share their objects in small groups, explaining each object.



Common and unique

Have the whole group stand in a circle. Explain that you will read a statement, and if it applies to them, they should take one step into the circle. For example, if they are an only child, they should step into the circle. Allow 3 seconds and tell youth to look and take note of who is in the circle with them. Have students take turns making statements. Note: In the Forming Stage, this activity helps youth get to know each other, learn what they have in common and what is special about them. In later group development stages, it can also be used to challenge assumptions, find common ground, or help them understand each other better.



Who am I?

Write the names of people or characters on individual pieces of paper. The names may be of real or fictional characters either living or dead. Keep the names secret before the activity. Tape one paper on the back of each participant. Either in pairs or allowing participants to mingle freely, encourage them to ask each other questions to try to figure out “Who am I?” Youth can only ask yes or no questions such as “Am I a real person?”; “Do I make people laugh?”; or “Am I on television?”

Storming stage

This stage is characterized by group conflict—sometimes subtle, other times more obvious—in the group. As members begin to feel more comfortable, opinions are voiced more strongly. Some members may attempt to assert leadership in the group. This is sometimes thought of as a “testing and proving” phase, which for the group to be successful leads to a problem-solving phase. Listening is a key skill to help this shift happen.

Implications for youth

Young people may show differing opinions, and there may be more disagreement than there appeared to be in the forming stage. Some young people may naturally assert leadership, while others may become completely silent. Be prepared to allow young people to take the lead, remaining alert to where they may need support. Keeping everyone engaged, practicing good listening, making sure everyone feels heard, and encouraging dialogue can help young people navigate these challenges. Focus on young people’s strengths as the storming stage may be a way to strengthen and channel them toward respect for one another and collective problem solving.

Storming stage team-building activities



Interview each other

Practicing interviews can help youth feel comfortable and confident in the interview process. It also helps them get to know their peers better. Encourage them to develop five deep (digging beneath the surface) questions—as a group or individually—and then conduct brief interviews of each other. They can practice public speaking by doing short presentations about their findings to the rest of the group, if time allows.



Hula hoop

Have the group form a circle and join hands, with two participants linking hands through the hula hoop. Pass the hoop around the circle. The youth must pass the hoop over their heads and then step out of the hoop to pass it to the next person. This is difficult to do solo and is easier when those on either side help to pass it. The hoop must be moved completely around the circle without anyone letting go of each other’s hands. As time allows, encourage youth to try completing the challenge more quickly. How fast can the team safely complete the task?



Youth participation ladder opinion line

Materials

- Printed copy of the youth participation ladder (Fletcher, A. 2011)
- Rope
- Signs for each level of participation in the ladder

Activity

Explain that the bottom three rungs represent three kinds of youth non-participation, and all the upper rungs are different kinds of participation. Explain the levels and give examples if needed. Ask the youth to stand next to the participation level that they believe best answers the following questions. Encourage them to explain why they stood where they did:

- At what level are you used to operating with adults in your everyday life?
- At what level do you feel most comfortable in your day-to-day life?
- What is the highest rung of the ladder you have ever reached? What was the situation?
- At what level do you feel this youth participatory action research project involves youth?
- At what level would you like this youth participatory action research project to involve youth?



Which way is Wright?

Materials

- 1–2 small objects (a ball or stuffed animal works great)
- A copy of the *Wright Family Vacation* story

Activity

Have the youth stand in a circle with only one to two feet distance between them. Tell them you will be reading a story where every time they hear the word right (any spelling), they should pass the object(s) to the right. When they hear the word left, they should pass the objects to the left. Read the story below, starting out slow and increasing to a normal (or even fast) speed as you go.

The Wright Family Vacation

Before the Wrights—Mr. and Mrs. Wright and their two children, Cindy and Jeff Wright—left for vacation, they discussed some potential destinations. So, no one would be left out or left wanting for a better vacation, they came up with the perfect idea.

Because all the Wrights are left-handed, it made sense that this summer, they would take a trip to London, where the world's largest left-handed store, called Anything Left-Handed, is located. All the Wrights plan to buy one, special left-handed item while at the store. Mrs. Wright is getting a can opener, while Mr. Wright is looking for a special left-handed pen to prevent smudges when he writes. Cindy Wright wants a left-handed scissors, and Jeff Wright can't wait to drink coffee out of a left-handed mug.

To the Wrights' surprise, they discovered that Left-Hander's Day is August 13, which is the day they arrive in London. The idea behind Left-Hander's Day is for everyone to celebrate in fun, practical ways, making right-handed family members, friends, and colleagues realize how "dexterous" lefties have to be because they are constantly adapting a right-handed world to work for lefthanders. Getting "right-handers" to do everything left-handed for the day is a great way to make the point! After all, the Wrights and other lefties feel they have every right to be left-handed.

Adaptation: Wrap up a small gift that can be shared and use it as the object to pass. Allow the youth who ends up with the gift to unwrap it and share it with the rest of the group.

Norming stage

As the name suggests, in this stage of development, the group has started to feel confident and cohesive as a group. They have grown more comfortable communicating with one another. Cliques tend to dissolve, and leadership is shared as the members reach a level of trust. They have begun to get a sense of their purpose, and some learning or growth is taking place.

Implications for youth

In this “middle” stage, comfort and trust can sometimes lead to complacency, and/or a loss of focus. While they do not want to return to the conflict of the storming stage, they also need encouragement to continue to move forward. This is a more productive time than either of the earlier two stages, but they are still not performing as well as they could be as a group. Praise and encouragement of positive behaviors as well as correction of behaviors that hold the group back go a long way toward moving the group into the performing stage.

Norming stage team-building activities



Human knot

If your group is very large you can divide into two groups. There should be five to ten people in a group. Have the group stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, facing the center. Ask participants to extend their hands in front of them and to first hold right hands and then left hands with other people in the circle. Each person must grab the hands of two different people and they cannot grab the hands of the person who is standing next to them. The object of the game is to get untangled and to end up in a full circle again, without ever letting go of each other's hands. It is best to let the group negotiate this activity themselves, without guidance from any outsiders. People's personalities come out in this activity; some people will naturally show leadership and direct others. Yet, all members of the circle are integral to the final outcome.



What makes a good listener?

(Hobson, A. and L. Pettersen 2008)

Divide the group in half; group A and B. One group (A) should stay in the room and one (B) should leave. Each group will receive instructions each time the activity takes place (three times). Instructions must be given separately to each group and can be given orally and/or in written format.

First experience

Group A

Sit on the floor and tell the individual who comes up to you a story about something important to you. (a trip you took, a memory of childhood, a time you were successful or not successful)

Group B

Enter the room and find a partner. Stand in front of this person and listen to them.

Second experience

Group A

Stand in one spot and as your partner tells a story. Tell your own story about something you are proud of, interrupting, with better details, more impressive information, etc.

Group B

Enter the room and find your partner. Stand in front of this person and tell a story about something you are proud of (an accomplishment, problem solved, etc.).

Third experience

Group A

Stand still but act distracted while your partner tells you a story (look around, behind, or to the side of your partner, talk about something else, be impatient).

Group B

Enter the room and find your partner. Stand in front of this person and talk about an important task that must be accomplished.

Reflection questions

- How did it feel to be ignored while you talked? To have someone's full attention?
- How did it feel to pay close attention? To distract and ignore from someone else's story?
- How are these experiences similar to real life? How are they different?
- What, if anything, would you change about how you listen to others?



A round of compliments

Tape a piece of paper to each youth participant's back. Provide the youth with pencils and encourage them to move about the room, writing compliments. Explain that the best compliments are brief, specific, and go beneath the surface (deeper than appearance). However, if they don't know the person well, compliments on appearance are also acceptable. Encourage them to keep going until they have put a compliment on the back of every person in the group. Then, give the youth time to read the compliments other students have given them.

Adaptation: Post sheets of paper around the walls of the room with each youth participant's name on them. Have the students rotate after 20–30 seconds with each sheet until they have gone all the way around the room.



Deserted island

Give the youth five minutes to think as a team about a difficult situation.

Situation: The group will be stuck on a deserted island together for one full month. You can only take five things with you besides the clothes on your back and enough food for one week. What five things would you take?

After the first five minutes are over, ask them what they would bring and why.

Reflection questions

- What was easy about this task? What was difficult?
- How did you make decisions as a group?
- If you had more time, do you think you would have made different decisions? Why or why not?
- What role(s) did different members of the group take on (leader, follower, questioner, notetaker, etc.)?



Performing stage

The performing stage is the “sweet spot” of group development. Group members are more focused on tasks rather than personal issues. They can work effectively together and on their own. Leadership and other roles are defined and operating together smoothly. The group is energized about their work and take pride in it. Not every group reaches this stage.

Implications for youth

A performing group of young people requires somewhat less supervision depending on the level of the group; the adult partner's role turns to answering questions, offering ideas, and providing guidance. It does not take any less attention though. This is the time to continue developing and practicing needed skills, which keeps them motivated, feeling valued, and moving forward.

Performing stage team-building activities



Solo-storming

Write a question on a whiteboard or sheet of flip chart paper. Provide small pieces of paper or adhesive notes and pencils for the youth. Ask them to individually solo-storm (brainstorming alone) as many possible responses to the question as they can, including serious, silly, or impossible responses and writing one idea on each piece of paper. Here are some possible questions:

- What arguments would you use to convince your school principal it's a good idea to get a giraffe (or have the youth choose a different animal) as a school pet?
- What could/would you do that is good for the world if you were invisible?
- If everyone around you in your day-to-day life was a spy, how would you determine who you could trust?
- You suddenly have the power to assign superpowers to anyone else. What superpowers would you assign to your family members and friends and why?

After 3–5 minutes of solo-storming, ask each youth to submit their funniest answer to one pile and their best (most creative and possibly effective) solution to a second pile. Share the answers/solutions from each pile.

Adaptation: After doing this activity with one of the questions above, use the solo-storming approach to help the youth think through how to tackle a serious problem they may be dealing with.



The distance between two people

In pairs, have participants stand a few feet apart facing one another. Ask them to talk to one another about themselves. When they find something they have in common, they take a step toward each other. When they find a difference between them, they take a step away. After a few minutes, ask these reflection questions:

- What did you notice about your differences? Your similarities?
- How far or close did you get to one another before you changed what you were looking for? How did you make that decision?
- Why might it be important in a group to have a balance between similarities and differences?



Team count

Have the team sit in a circle facing away from each other. They may close their eyes if they wish. Tell them they will work together to count to 20. Only one person may speak at a time. If two people say a number at the same time, the whole group has to start again with one. After several attempts, ask the following reflection questions:

- What did you notice about how the group worked (or didn't work) together to get to 20?
- What was difficult? What made it seem easy?
- How did your body feel when you thought about saying a number? What kind of thoughts or emotions did you have while the group was counting?
- What roles did you notice individuals taking on in the group?

Adaptation: If there is time, have them turn their chairs around and face each other. Encourage them to try counting to 20 again. The same rules apply, plus they must not use nonverbal cues to signal each other. What changes, if any, do they notice when they are facing one another?



Five by five

Ask each youth to write down five things on a note card that they like. Ask them to each write down five things they do not like on a separate note card. Collect the cards and in no particular order, read each card, inviting the youth to guess who the card came from. The game continues to help the group get to know one another better while also building greater understanding.

Adjourning stage

Unless something else changes the course of a performing group, they complete their task, which leads them to the final phase, adjourning. This is sometimes called the “mourning” stage, but it does not have to be sad. It can be a time of tying up loose ends, reflection, and evaluation for the group. Even if the group is not disbanding, perhaps they are finishing a project they have been working on. Closure can help them end the project with a sense of well-being and accomplishment.

Implications for youth

This is an opportunity to evaluate the youths' experiences as well as encourage them to evaluate the project and learn from the results. Youth gain insight as they reflect on their role in the project, what they enjoyed about it, and what they might have done to further develop their skills. During the other stages, the group has become largely interdependent. However, in this adjourning stage, by encouraging youth to complete closing tasks independently, you can help reinforce the lessons they learned as individuals and the sense of personal achievement (rather than only as a member of a team).

Adjourning stage team-building activities



Mirror, mirror

Ask the youth to choose at least three questions listed below to reflect on their experiences, learning, and growth during the project. Let them know you would appreciate reading their reflections, but they do not have to share them.

- What did I try that I had never done before?
- What challenge was I afraid or nervous about at the beginning that I overcame?
- What am I most proud of in my own work?
- What new friends or connections did I make that are important to me?
- What skills did I develop?
- What surprised me about the part I played in the project?

- What did I enjoy most about being part of this group? What did I like least?
- How can I use what I learned here in the future?

When they have responded to at least three questions, give them an envelope. Ask them to write their name and address on the envelope. Tell them you will send them their reflections in one month as a reminder of their experience and what they gained from it.

Adaptation: If you choose to, you could also write a note reflecting on your observations of each young person's growth to add to their envelope. They will appreciate the feedback.



Celebrate good times

Invite the youth participants to help plan a small celebration for the group. Encourage them to think back on what they have learned about other members of the team during the project. Then, ask them to write down three things that would make the celebration special to other members of the group. Give them time to share what they wrote down and why. Before making decisions about how to celebrate, reflect on the suggestions:

- What were some similarities in the suggestions? What were the differences?
- How did it feel to write down ideas that would make the celebration special for someone else instead of for yourself?
- If someone wrote down a suggestion that would make it special for you, how did that feel?
- How do you want to celebrate as a group?



Top ten list

Tell the group that they are going to develop a “top ten” list of the lessons they have learned during the project. They might think of it as lessons they want to share with the next group to take on a youth participatory action project. The lessons might be things they learned about themselves either individually or as a group, or they might be lessons learned about the process of working with the community on a project. Encourage them to **solo-storm** ideas for a few minutes, then come together to share their ideas and narrow the list to ten.

Adaptation: If there is time, encourage them to create a poster for their top ten list.



An attitude of gratitude

No matter how great a team might be, they still had help along the way. Suggest that developing an attitude of gratitude is how we show appreciation for others, acknowledge help they have received, and reflect on positive connections they have made. As a group, develop a list of people or groups to thank. Explain that true gratitude is not only about saying thank you. It is best to be specific about (1) what help or resources they received, and (2) how it helped them achieve their goals. Provide pre-made thank you cards or materials to make their own.



Additional team-building resources are available at
blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach

Pre-planning activities

Discussion: Project parameters and expectations

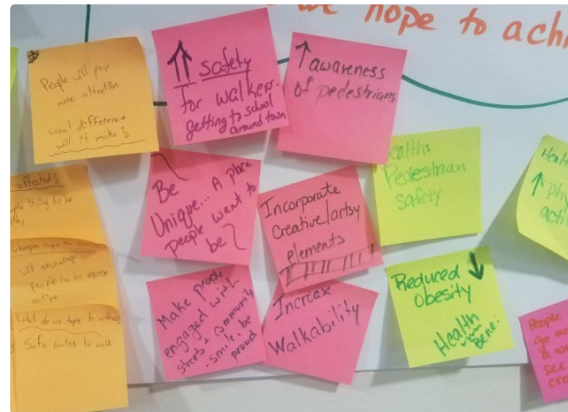
To achieve project success, all group members must understand the parameters of the project and the expectations being placed on them. Failure to establish group norms ahead of time may lead to unexpected and frustrating challenges experienced by youth and adults along the way. Participants will need answers to the following questions. During your first meeting, provide guidance about the first set of questions below in a printed 1–2-page handout they can share with parents/caregivers and refer to it later if needed.

Note: Depending on the situation, you may need to provide options for some of these questions and discuss with the group.

1. What are the project goals?
2. What is the project timeline?
3. What are the specific parameters of the project?
Based on funding or other requirements, what kinds of projects/activities can or cannot be supported?
4. How often, when, and where will the group meet? What is the time expectation?
5. What other reasonable expectations do you have of the group?
6. What should participants do if they are unable to attend a meeting? If they are unable to meet one of the other expectations?
7. What happens if the expectations are not met?

Use discussion or other consensus-building processes to help the group make decisions together about the following questions below.

- How will communications between meetings be handled? Do the methods work for everyone in the group?
- What expectations do group members have of the facilitator(s)?
- What questions or concerns do they have about the project?



Group agreements and ground rules

(Innovation Center and National 4-H Council 2003)

When ground rules are developed and agreed upon by all members of a group, they are much more likely to be upheld. Whenever possible, ground rules should be framed in the positive (the desired behaviors), and every group member should agree with them before they are finalized. Try to keep the list relatively short. Keep the rules brief and memorable. Post them during every meeting. Here is a short activity for developing ground rules with a group.



Setting common ground rules

Pre-activity team-builders



- Who's in the bag?
- Common and unique

Learning objectives

- Youth will build a safe and respectful list of rules
- Youth will learn how ground rules help them maximize the group's time together.

Materials needed

- Flip chart paper
- Markers

Activity instructions

Ask the group, "What are some ground rules we can all agree on to manage our time together?" Write down all responses. Then, ask the group if they want to combine any rules, or if they can help reframe any rules that are stated in the negative (behaviors they do not want vs. the positive behaviors they do). Ask if there are rules they do not agree with. Encourage respectful discussion about rules, seeking common ground whenever possible.

Post the final list each time the group meets. Check back with this list periodically throughout the project to determine if changes or additions need to be made to the ground rules.

Reflection questions

- What did you notice about the group as we developed the list of ground rules?
- Did any ground rules bring out an emotional reaction? If yes, which ones and why?
- What other settings or situations might these rules be helpful in? Why do you think so?

Define community

Everyone defines community in a different way. For some, the word community refers to geography—such as a county, city, village, or neighborhood. For others, the word may refer to a cultural community, faith community, or some other group whose members have one or more personal characteristics in common. Still others define community in terms of social connections, as in civic or other voluntary affiliations.

Regardless of how individuals define community, the group must work together to decide what is meant by the term for this project, considering questions such as:

- ▶ What are the geographical boundaries of the project we want to plan?
- ▶ Who do we want to serve?
- ▶ What is our reach or scope? In other words, who do we have the capacity to serve?

Note: However the group defines community for the community health project, make sure their definition is not so narrow that it excludes marginalized groups or individuals within their chosen area. By the same token, ensure that their community is not so broad that they cannot possibly reach everyone.



Defining community

Pre-activity team-builders



- Who's in the bag?
- Common and unique

Learning objectives

- Youth will define the community(s) to work in
- Youth will explore assets and issues in that community.

Materials needed

- Butcher paper
- Markers

Prepare ahead

Divide each sheet of butcher paper into four quadrants (one sheet per small group). Add titles to the quadrants as follows:

1. Define the term community—what makes up our understanding of the word
2. Signs that a community is working well
3. Signs that a community may not be working well
4. List communities (geographic, cultural, social or other) we share as a group

Small group discussion (15–20 minutes)

Break into small groups and give each group a piece of butcher paper and markers. In each group, choose one member to take notes and another to lead discussion about the prompts in each quadrant. Explain that leading discussion means asking questions and making sure everyone gets a chance to speak.

Large group discussion (10 minutes)

Have each group share a response to one of the first three quadrants, giving each group a chance to add a unique idea in each of the areas.

Then, ask each group to share the list of common communities they wrote in the fourth prompt. Write their responses on butcher paper or whiteboard. From the complete list, look for similarities and differences. Are there any communities all group members belong to?

Reflection questions

- What surprised you during the discussion?
- What were the most important ideas raised?
- How did this discussion help you look at the community or issues in a new way?
- How does this help us get ready for taking action?

Adaptation: If time is short or your group is small, you can do this activity as a whole group in 10–15 minutes.

Later, in the **choose your battle** section, the youth will have the opportunity to examine their chosen community from a different perspective and likely become aware of details about their community they have never noticed before.



ACTION PLAN ALERT

The youth may add their definition of community to the Action Plan when they have completed this activity.

Understanding policy, systems, and environment (PSE) change

When explaining PSE change to young people, it helps to provide both definitions and specific examples. A few examples, including videos or websites are included below.

What is policy change?

Interventions that use laws, ordinances, rules, regulations, and/or mandates to affect change in population behavior. A few examples include:

- ▶ **Farm to school**
- ▶ Safe routes to school
- ▶ Including newer health risks, such as vaping, in an institution's tobacco policy

What is system change?

Interventions or changes that leverage the functional components of an organization, institution, or system. A few examples include:

- ▶ **Smarter lunchrooms**
- ▶ **Gardening for food pantries**
- ▶ Ensuring a hospital system goes smoke-free

What is environment change?

Interventions that involve changes to the economic, social, or built/physical environment. A few examples include:

- ▶ Bike paths/trails
- ▶ **Social marketing**
- ▶ **Healthy retail**

Some projects include all three—policy, systems, and environment change—such as [this Complete Streets project led by young people](#).

Case studies of youth engaged in PSE change are available at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach.

Why make the shift from programs to PSE change?

Often, when we think about helping people with health-related issues, we think about offering programs to change what they know or what they do. Programs are useful short-term strategies for creating small-scale change. To make the changes last longer and reach more people, PSE is a more effective tool. PSE “makes the healthy choice the easy choice.” To better understand how programs and PSE are different, it helps to see their key characteristics side by side.

	Program	PSE change
How is change created?	Programs use activities to provide direct education or sharing of information with individuals to change what they know or what they do.	PSE changes things around those individuals—laws or rules, how an organization functions, or the spaces where people live and work.
What tools are used?	Typically, programs involve curriculum and or training for individuals.	PSE most often uses research, develops action plans, and involves people in making change happen.
How long does it last?	Programs have a beginning and an end. The length of time varies.	PSE changes are ongoing and intentionally infused into how things are done so they continue naturally without additional effort.



Taking your ideas to the next level—the PSE level

Learning objectives

- Youth will learn the difference between programs and PSE change strategies.
- Youth will practice thinking about how they can influence change at a PSE level, rather than an individual level.

Materials needed

- A pair of dice
- A copy of the table above showing the difference between a program and PSE change

Activity instructions

Using the table above, review the differences between a program and PSE change. Then, ask the youth the following questions:

- What programs have you been involved in or seen in the community?
- What PSE change strategies have you seen implemented in the community?

Next, divide the group into 3 small teams. Ask each team to work together to brainstorm 2–3 health issues in the community. For each round of this game, each team will play a different role. The three roles are:

- **Challengers**—The Challengers describe a health challenge in the local community, then ask the Strategists to suggest a PSE change strategy to address the issue.
- **Strategists**—The Strategists roll one of the dice. Depending on the number that comes up, the team must suggest a PSE change strategy in a specific category.
 - If 1 or 2 is rolled, suggest a **policy change** strategy.
 - If 3 or 4 is rolled, suggest a **systems change** strategy.
 - If 5 or 6 is rolled, suggest an **environment change** strategy.
- **PSE Pros**—The PSE Pros listen to the challenge and the suggested strategy. The Pros may ask questions about the strategy, if needed. Then, using the criteria for programs and PSE change, the Pros determine if the Strategists succeeded in suggesting a PSE change strategy.

If the Pros decide that yes, the Strategists suggested a PSE change strategy instead of a program, the Strategists earn a point. If not, the whole group discusses what changes might be needed to make it a PSE change strategy.

Rotate the roles and play again until at least one PSE change strategy has been suggested and discussed for each health issue brainstormed.

Adaptations: If the group is small, some of the roles can be combined. If the youth are struggling with specific categories of PSE, do not use the dice and allow them to suggest a strategy from any category. Finally, consider encouraging a youth member to facilitate the discussion of a strategy; it does not always have to be an adult facilitator.

Reflection questions

- In what ways was it difficult (or easy) to think about PSE changes instead of programs?
- What PSE strategies from the game might you like to help with? What did you like about them?
- What other PSE change ideas do you have for a community health issue you care about?

Identifying strengths of team members

Young people as well as adults find the greatest sense of success when they can use their special skills and strengths to help the group. Every single group member has something to contribute; they may just not be aware of what. The role of the adult facilitator is to draw out youths' strengths in two significant ways:

1. Observe the youth as they interact with others in the group, paying attention to what skills and strengths each young person brings to the activities. Then seek opportunities for them to develop and apply those skills or strengths during the project.
2. Provide opportunities for youth to identify and develop individual skills and strengths through team builders, skill building activities, and opportunities to practice and apply skills in real-life situations.

Strengths and skills for leadership

Hobson, A. and L. Pettersen 2008

Pre-activity team-builders



Who am I?

Learning objectives

- Youth will identify leadership skills they already possess
- Youth will understand they can develop other skills
- Youth will identify a skill they want to develop further.

Materials needed

- Pencils
- Leadership self-assessment form (page 12) from <https://counties.extension.wisc.edu/buffalo/files/2010/08/YELL-Leadership-Curriculum1.pdf>

Activity instructions

Tell the participants that everyone has things they are good at. Everyone. We call those things our “strengths.” Sometimes we need help identifying our strengths. When we know what our strengths are, it is our responsibility to use them to help ourselves and other people. Ask the youth to each take a pencil and a **leadership self-assessment** form and do three things:

1. Circle the things they are already good at
2. Underline those they want to get better at
3. Put a star next to the one they most want to develop

It can sometimes be uncomfortable for young people to share positive things about themselves. However, it can help them understand and accept their strengths to share them out loud, so pair and share strategies can help. Encourage youth to find a partner. Then, ask each youth to share up to three of their strengths and provide an example of how they use one of the strengths in their everyday lives. Finally, ask each youth to introduce their partner, sharing at least one strength with the whole group.

Reflection questions

- What surprised you, if anything, on your **leadership self-assessment**?
- How did it feel to know that you have strengths as a leader?
- How do you think you might be able to use your strengths to help this project?
- What are some ways you use your strengths in other areas of your life?



Choose your battle

! HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

Choose your battle has five parts. Not all projects will start with the first part or work through them in order. Depending on the group, the youth might also return to an earlier part when new information comes to light or a big obstacle is identified.

PART 1 What's in a community?

Youth question their biases of the community they plan to serve and learn to look deeper, understanding the community in a new way.

PART 2 Issues and assets

Community assets and issues are identified. It is especially important that youth consults outside resources in this process, such as online databases, community resource lists, or a photography project.

PART 3 Identifying need(s)

Youth determine specific needs for policy, systems, and environment change in their local community.



YOU'RE IN CONTROL

.....
We believe the steps outlined here apply to all youth action projects, but the time it takes to move through the steps will be unique to each project. As an adult facilitator, assess what your group does and does not know about the community, issues and assets, and potential partners and then choose what activities will keep the young people you are working with engaged and moving forward.

PART 4 Prioritizing

Youth use what they have learned to choose one issue to tackle. They choose an issue with large potential impact that is still manageable and interesting to the youth.

PART 5 Potential partners

Youth identify and talk to potential partners—the organizations, leaders, and stakeholders who are engaged with this issue.



Crucial questions

By the end of the **choose your battle** section, youth should be able to clearly answer the following questions. It is up to you as the adult facilitator to choose which activities you use from this section to support the youth in getting to those answers.

What community do we plan to serve?

What new, deeper understanding do we have about health issues in the community?

What community health-related issues have we identified?

Which issue is the most important for us to address?

What evidence (data, stories, observations, etc.) do we have to show that it is a community need to be addressed?

How do we want to work on the issue in our own unique way?

What do we think will be different about the community when we have completed our project? Why?

Who do we need to involve as partners to achieve our vision? Who else thinks it is an important issue?
Who is most impacted by the issue?

Who do we want to help us?

Earlier, in **pre-planning**, the youth should have defined what they mean by community, whether it was a neighborhood, cultural community, city, school, or some other grouping of people and resources. Ideally, it is a community they know well. Perhaps they even grew up in it and feel that they know it “like the backs of their hands.” However, based on evaluation of pilot projects, the community may not be as familiar as they think. In these cases, it is important to take another look.

When youth members learn to see their community with fresh eyes, open hearts, and questioning minds, they can begin to see the community’s strengths and challenges more clearly. Identifying challenging community issues may be painful for youth, but this can be balanced by introducing them to community partners and organizations that are working to improve community health. Within that balance, they can begin to understand their niche—their special place—in helping to solve the issues at hand.

What’s in a community?

The area or group of people/resources the youth identified earlier as the community in which they want to work may be very familiar to them. It may be so familiar, in fact, that they have never really looked deeply at it. Each of the activities below from The Innovation Center’s *Building Community Toolkit* are the youths’ “first wave” of looking at their community. Later, they will dig deeper beneath the surface to aspects of the community that **selective attention** may miss.

Following the team-building activities are two activities for beginning to examine what is in the community. Choose one or both activities to get a picture of the community before moving on to identifying issues and assets.



Selective attention test

Activity instructions

Tell the youth they’ll be watching a video called “Selective Attention Test” (<https://youtu.be/vJG698U2Mvo>). If they have seen the video, ask them not to say anything that ruins it for others. Encourage the youth to follow the on-screen prompts, and play the video, pausing it at 39 seconds. Then ask the following reflection questions.

Reflection questions

- How many passes did you count?
- Did you see the gorilla?
- Why do you think you may not have noticed the gorilla?
- How might selective attention affect how we look at our community?
- What can we do to see our community more clearly?



ACTION PLAN ALERT

The youth may add a short description of what they think is special about their community in the Action Plan when they have completed either of the following activities.

Activity option 1: Community mind map

Innovation Center and National 4-H Council 2001

Pre-activity team-builders



- Youth participation ladder opinion line
- Selective attention test (page 26)

Learning objectives

- Youth will share participants' personal pictures of the community.
- Youth will identify common elements and roles of community.
- Youth will identify ways in which connections between youth and adults can positively affect the community.

Materials needed

- Legal-size or 11"x17" paper
- Markers
- Flip chart paper

Activity instructions

Make sure youth understand the concept of mind maps: visual representations of ideas and how they connect, typically around a single topic or idea. Let them know they can include anything in a mind map, including thoughts, feelings, concepts, or other items they think of. Ask each youth participant to draw a mind map in response to the following question:

- When you think of the community we decided to focus on, what are the first things you think of? Consider anything—places you go, special memories, things that are special to you, etc.

Give the youth 10 minutes to draw their maps and let them know they will be sharing it with the rest of the group. After their maps are finished, ask the youth to share their maps, keeping the presentations brief and focused on the most important details. Then ask the following reflection questions (more questions are available in the [original activity](#)).

Reflection questions

Write key points from the youths' responses to these questions on the flip chart paper as notes for future planning.

- What did the maps have in common?
- What differences did you notice between different maps? Why do you think those differences exist?
- What was missing from everyone's maps that you think is important to note about the community?
- What new insights do you have about the community as a result of this activity?
- Considering your commitment to helping this community, what do you think will be important to keep in mind as the group moves forward?



Activity option 2: Dimensions of community

Innovation Center and National 4-H Council 2001

Pre-activity team-builders



- Youth participation ladder opinion line
- Selective attention test (page 26)

Learning objectives

- Youth will identify elements of community development and give examples.
- Youth will understand what these elements look like in their own community.

Materials needed

- Flip chart paper
- Markers
- *Dimensions of Community* handout (page 120 in *Building Communities Toolkit*)
- Pencils

Activity instructions

Give each youth participant a copy of the *Dimensions of Community* handout. Explain that they will be considering the community they have chosen from four different perspectives: economic/wealth, power, spiritual/cultural, and social. Ask the youth to identify examples in each of these areas. Explain that each quadrant of the handout is further divided into positive and negative, as there may be things going well and things that can be improved on in each area.

Give the youth participants 10 minutes to work on the handout on their own. Then ask them to share a few key ideas from each quadrant with the group. Write key points from the youths' responses to these questions on the flip chart paper as notes for future planning.

Reflection questions

- Was it easier to come up with ideas for things that are going well or things that could use improvement? Why?
- Looking back at each of the four sections, where do you see the greatest opportunities for youth to influence change?
- Which would be hardest to change? Why?
- Where might the group be able to draw on existing resources to help influence change?

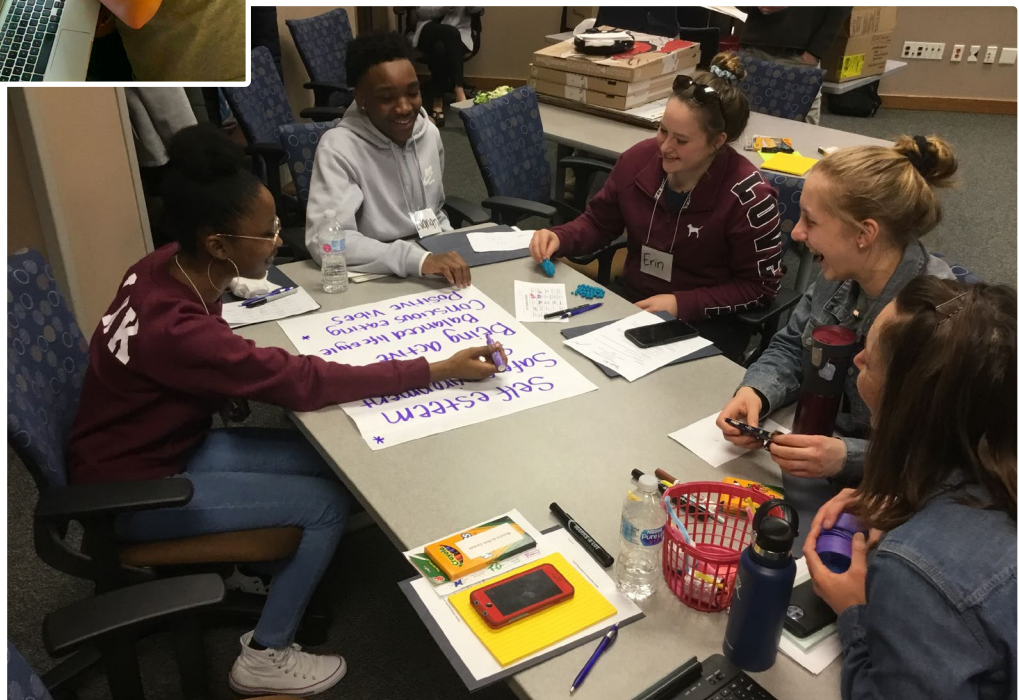


Identify issues and assets in your community

Now that the youth have a more detailed picture of their community, it is time to identify its issues and assets. Every community has issues or areas that could be improved, which are meant to be worked on. Every community also has assets, which are the internal tools with which to improve community life. Assets are good things: for example, the skills and strengths of its members; its physical, cultural or social characteristics; or the problem-solving approaches that have been used in the past to build or strengthen the community. As youth consider issues and assets in the community, a few guiding questions and resources can help:

- ▶ What health issue(s) are you passionate about making people aware of?
- ▶ How does this issue affect you and others?
- ▶ What information is available about issues and assets related to health, nutrition, and obesity in your community? Several suggested web-based databases (state and national) are listed on the YACH Project webpage at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach.

For youth to begin to understand the community change process, it can help for them to use what they know of their community to create a visual representation and follow that with a representation of what they would like their community to look like. When they develop their own vision, they can begin to see where they might fit in to helping achieve that vision.





Envisioning community change through storyboarding

Sabo Flores, K. 2013

Pre-activity team-builders



- Interview each other
- Youth participation ladder opinion line

Learning objectives

- Youth will learn how to use storyboarding to communicate about their community.
- Youth will learn how storyboarding can help them develop a vision for their project.

Materials needed

- Large flip charts and markers or enough whiteboard space for each group

Activity instructions

Explain to youth that they will be creating a storyboard. Storyboards are visual ways to tell a particular story similar to a comic strip or cartoon, showing different phases of that story as “snapshots.” They are a valuable way to help others understand what they see in their community as well as what they want to see in the future. They may choose to use ideas from the earlier community defining activities. As part of their storyboards, they will be using pictures and words to represent assets, also referred to as “capitals,” which can be social, cultural, human, built, financial, or natural (see the handout on page 8 of the *Youth Leading Community Change Handbook* for more detail).

Remind the youth to consider how their community might be different as a result of changes in policies, systems, or environment (PSE) change. If it helps, take a few minutes to help them think back to the PSE change activity they did in the [Pre-planning section](#).



Give participants two sheets of flip chart paper and markers. On the first sheet, ask them to draw pictures and use words to answer the following questions:

- What is happening in the community before the start of the community project that relates to the long-term, complex societal issue you have chosen to work on (e.g., hunger, obesity, nutrition, physical activity, etc.)?
- Which community assets are being shown?

Then, on the second sheet, ask them to draw pictures and use words to answer these questions:

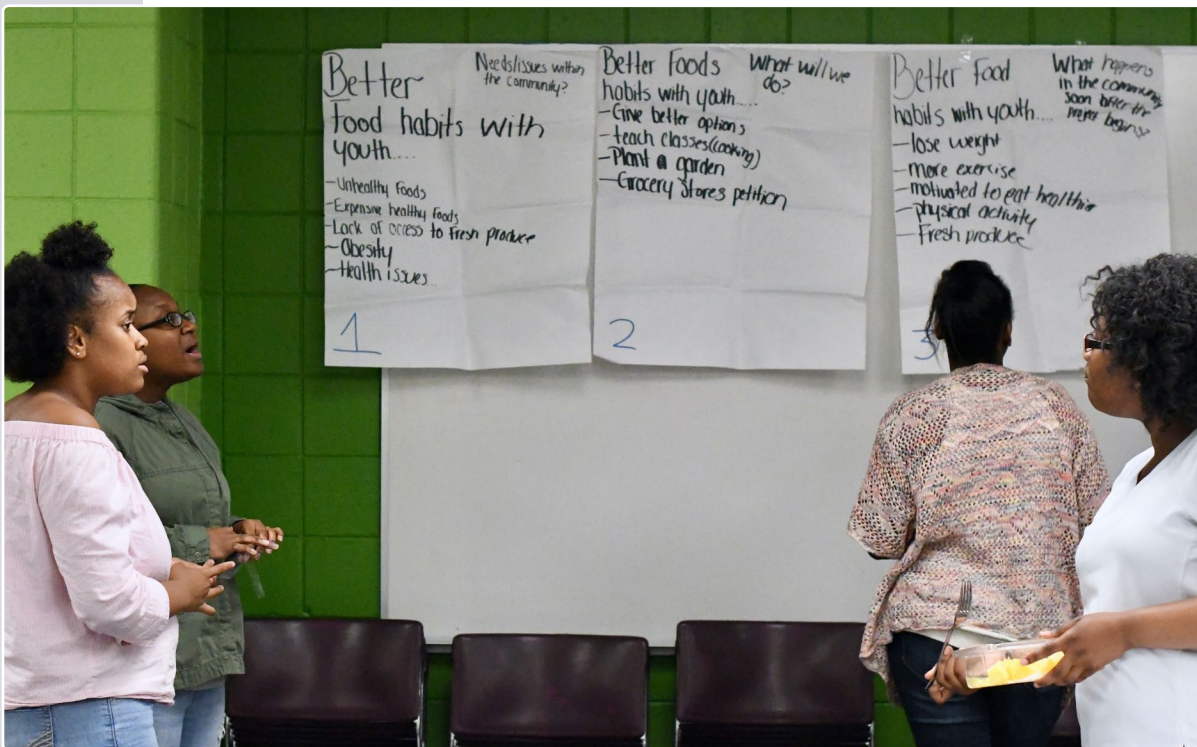
- What is happening in the community at the end of the project or after a long period of time because of your efforts?
- What new community capital was built (long-term outcome)?

Adaptation: Encourage the youth to think about how they might want to talk about their ideas with others, to help others understand their ideas. Then, they may present their ideas in front of several adults or another group of youth. Provide time for the audience to ask clarifying questions that help the youth refine their ideas and/or see things in a different way.

Reflection questions

- Looking at both storyboards, what are some assets in this community?
- What are some problems? (Keep a list on a separate sheet for later use in defining areas to work on.)
- What changes do we want to see?

Note: This activity builds energy and is a good way to bring people together who may identify their communities differently. The original activity (see References) also includes two action planning steps that can be storyboarded. If the youth respond well to this activity, it is a great idea to come back to this later when the group is action planning for what steps they might take to achieve the identified vision.



Other activities to identify issues and assets in your community

Identifying issues and assets may take more than one meeting and more than one way of looking at the community. Storyboarding is recommended as an opening activity and the following are additional ideas for digging deeper and gaining further insights into the issues and assets identified. Take the time and don't move on until the youth have a strong understanding of the community's true issues and assets. Their deep understanding is the foundation of a successful project to address a true community need.

- ▶ **Photovoice project**—Youth show assets and challenges in the community by taking pictures of them to create a story or map of the community.
- ▶ **Walking survey**—Youth decide what they want to look for in their community and then they walk through neighborhoods, the downtown, or other areas observing the community through the lens they have chosen.
- ▶ **Mind mapping**—Youth list all community issues and strengths they can think of on a white board and then begin to draw lines to show relationships between the issues and strengths of the community.

For more detail on these and other effective strategies for identifying issues and assets in a community, visit the YACH Project website at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach.

Proofing the need

Youth participatory action research is about more than the youth identifying a project they care about. It needs to address a real need in the community. So, how do youth really know the issue they have identified is a need? They ask challenging questions like “How are people in the community affected by this?” and “Who is already working on this issue?” They research the topic from a variety of perspectives.

Action research is a recommended approach to learn about an issue from people who are affected and in a way that will lead to action, as the name implies. You might use different techniques to learn more, including interviews, surveys, and inviting people with expertise to speak. Refer to this [Action Research Handout on page 65 of the Youth Participatory Action Research curriculum](#) to learn more (Institute for Community Research 2014).

The ultimate chocolate chip cookie

Activity instructions

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and the “best” of anything is subjective. Help youth get to know each other better as they practice evaluating a product during the Ultimate Chocolate Chip Cookie warm-up activity. They'll work together to choose what criteria by which to judge the cookies then implement the cookie rubric by assessing several different cookies.

Adaptation: Consider using a more nutritious food that has a lot of variation to it—granola bars for example. [See the full activity at Ultimate Chocolate Chip Cookie on pp. 16–22 of Youth Leading Community Change: An Evaluation Toolkit](#) (Sabo Flores, K. 2013).





Relational mapping and learning from others

Innovation Center and National 4-H Council 2001

Pre-activity team-builders



- **Hula hoop**
- **Interview each other**
- **A round of compliments**
- **The ultimate chocolate chip cookie (page 32)**

Learning objectives

People and organizations who can provide information, resources, expertise, access to participants, and much more are an essential part of project success. **Relational Mapping from page 58 of *Building Community Toolkit*** is a process to map people and organizations in your community from different sectors (public, private/business, non-profit, religious, etc.) and to consider how closely they might be involved in your work. Youth might want to interview them, ask for their help, and/or ask who else they should talk to for more information or a different perspective, thereby broadening their network.

Interviews and relational meetings are an opportunity to learn more and build relationships with others in the community who are interested in or affected by the same issue. These could potentially be partners or beneficiaries of youth actions.

Learning objectives

- Youth will identify community members who care about the identified issue.
- Youth will learn about the issue from a variety of perspectives.
- Youth will practice making informed decisions about community issues.
- Youth will learn strategies for using existing relationships to broaden their network.

Materials needed

- Flip chart paper
- Markers
- Resources for interviews and surveys (available at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach)
- Community resource website(s) identified locally (optional)

Prepare ahead

Leaders can identify community resource people or websites about community resources to help youth add to their list of community members who care about the issue.

Activity instructions

- On a flip chart page, brainstorm a list of people who might care about the identified issue. No ideas are bad. Just encourage all ideas to flow. Make sure the youth consider both formal and informal groups, including citizens, organizations, agencies, and others who might be interested.
- When a list has been compiled, encourage youth to consider who they want to talk with to get a range of perspectives on the issue. They might consider who they have access to, and how they might reach out to people or groups they do not know as well.
- Encourage each youth to identify at least one person on the list who they might reach out to for an interview about the issue.

Reflection questions

- What possible relationships surprised you? Why?
- How are you feeling about interviewing someone in the community about the issue?
- What question(s) are you most interested to ask?
- What responses do you think you might get?

Narrowing it down—one issue in the youth niche

Issues around food, nutrition, or obesity tend to be the result of many more complex issues and root causes that intersect and blossom into greater issues. They often intersect with societal challenges that have been part of our world for decades or longer. This depth is the reason we need to look at these issues from a policy, systems, and environmental change perspective. It is also the reason that the issues need to be narrowed down to something manageable. As we have mentioned, youth have an important voice in food, nutrition, and obesity issues, and it is vital to help them identify where their voices can make the most difference.

Setting criteria

After the warm-up, as a group, determine criteria for choosing the issue youth want to address. Use these criteria to identify issues with the greatest potential. The criteria discussion will help raise pros and cons, but youth will still need to come to agreement within the group and with stakeholders.

Learning objectives

- Youth will learn to understand personal values—their own as well as others.
- Youth will learn to prioritize and assess the viability of an issue.

Materials needed

- Post-it Notes and pencils
- Flip chart or whiteboard and markers

Activity instructions

Tell the youth that they will be developing criteria for what issue they will address. Ask them to start by using Post-it Notes to **solo-storm** ideas (one idea per note) in response to the following question:

- What would make an issue the best one for our group to address?

Encourage them to consider criteria about their role or niche in addressing the issue, the community's need and openness to their ideas, funding and resources they could commit to it, or anything else they think is important in making the decision. Remind them that the issue must fit within the parameters that were laid out at the beginning of the project. The criteria they set will further narrow their focus.

When they have had a chance to generate their own ideas, invite the youth to post them on the wall. Ask them to work together to group similar ideas and discuss all ideas as they work. Do they need clarification about anyone else's ideas? Use either consensus processes (such as nominal group process) or voting to identify the main criteria they will use.

Reflection questions

- What similarities between group members' ideas did you notice?
- What were some differences between ideas?
- What criteria is there still some disagreement about? Why?
- Test the criteria on one issue and one solution the group has considered. How do the criteria help provide clarity about the issue and solution?



ACTION PLAN ALERT

The youth may add a short explanation of the community issue they want to address and their youth niche in how to address it in the Action Plan when they have completed this activity.

Discussion: What is our niche?

You can use the criteria they selected to choose the issue they want to work on. Then, a few key questions can help them think through how they can have an impact on the issue they have identified.

- ▶ What is the youth opportunity (“niche”) to add to existing or new efforts?
- ▶ What is in youths’ realm of control?
- ▶ What can they realistically impact?

Identifying partners

It can help young people and adults to know they are not alone in tackling tough issues. However, it is not always easy to know where to turn for collaborative support. Coming to understand the youth niche as they did in the previous step can help. When they know what their own role is in working on the issue, they are better able to (1) identify what is beyond their reach, and (2) identify partners—peer and adult—whose interests align with their own.

To identify partners, encourage the youth to consider a few key questions:

- ▶ Who else could we involve?
- ▶ Who are my allies?
- ▶ Who might we need to help us achieve our goals?
- ▶ How can I motivate my peers?

People and organizations who can provide information, resources, expertise, access to participants, and much more are an essential part of project success.





Relational mapping reboot

Pre-activity team-builders



- Human knot
- A round of compliments

Learning objectives

This is a good opportunity to go back and revisit the **relational mapping activity** the youth did earlier in the **proofing the need** section (drawing from **Relational Mapping from page 58 of the Building Community Toolkit**).

Based on what they learned from interviews, speakers, and/or surveys, what new or additional connections can they make between their issue and community members and leaders? Youth may find they can add different people, organizations, and assets from the community in different sectors (public, private/business, non-profit, religious, etc.). This is a great time for them to consider how closely additional connections might be involved with their issue.

ACTION PLAN ALERT

The youth may want to add a short list of key partners in the Notes section of the Action Plan when they have completed this activity. Notes like these may not end up being part of their action plan, but they can be helpful items to remember when they are working on it.

FACILITATOR NOTE

Youth-adult partnerships

Youth-adult partnerships are critical to the success of community efforts involving youth, since many of the spaces and resources required for success are dominated by adults. Many adults are not used to working together with and sharing power with youth. Spending time to build youth/adult partnerships can improve group dynamics and communication.

A simple activity to create norms for communication is to separate youth and adults into two rooms. Have the youth generate a list of “Benefits of Working with Adults” and “Challenges of Working with Adults” and have the adults generate similar lists about working with youth. Then bring them together to share the lists. Process the activity by identifying areas that showed up for both youth and adults and ways the lists are different. Then consider creating some practices or norms that will maximize the benefits and minimize the challenges.

Additional resources for developing youth-adult partnerships can be found on the YACH Project webpage at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach.



Evaluation checkpoint

Without a clear, shared understanding of the issue they have chosen and the community in which to work, your team is likely to struggle later. When the youth are ready to move on from this step, they should be able to clearly answer all of “[The Crucial Questions](#)” included at the beginning of this section and repeated below. The activity below will guide the youth through a process of evaluating their work during this stage of the project.



Youth self-assessment

In the following activity, youth team members will complete peer interviews to assess whether they have met the objectives of the project cycle stage they have just completed.

Learning objectives

- Youth will practice interviewing peers and using interviews as an evaluation tool.
- Youth will identify weaknesses or limitations in understanding the issue.
- Youth will assess achievement of project stage objectives and readiness to move to the next stage.

Materials needed

- List of “The Crucial Questions” for this step
- Paper
- Pens or pencils

Activity instructions

Tell the youth they will be interviewing each other to assess the group’s achievement of objectives in this stage. Share with them “The Crucial Questions” for this step and make sure they understand what the questions are asking. Separate team members into pairs or small groups and ask them to decide who will be the interviewer and interviewee(s). Encourage them to record responses to questions. To support individual leadership in the group, consider dividing questions among pairs/small groups. Then, each pair/small group should lead a discussion around their questions with the larger group.

Evaluation questions

- **Defining community**
 - What community do we plan to serve?
 - What new, deep understanding do we have about health issues in our community?
- **Identifying community health issues**
 - What community health-related issues have we identified?
 - Which issue is the most important to us to address?
 - What evidence (data, stories, observations, etc.) do we have to show that it is a community need to be addressed?
 - How do we want to work on the issue in our own unique way?
- **Expected outcomes**
 - What do we think will be different about the community when we have completed our project?
 - Why?
- **Partners**
 - Who do we need to involve as partners to achieve our vision? Who else thinks it is an important issue? Who is most impacted by the issue?
 - Who do we want to help us?

Reflection questions

- Were there any questions for which you did not have an answer?
- Did you identify any other information that might be missing or areas needing more detail?
- How can you continue to learn about the community, issue, need, and partners while moving ahead to the next project stages?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Choose one to three questions that are appropriate for your project from the **personal reflection section of Evaluation** and encourage the youth to think back on their experience so far. Reflections may be journaled or discussed either as a group or one-on-one. Keep these reflection times brief and thoughtful.



Fail fast

A valuable way for youth to evaluate their progress to this point is to get feedback from an outside group. The **fail fast activity**, which is part of the **raising awareness section** that follows, is also a good transition to the next step in the process. Youth may develop a short presentation of their answers to the above questions to share with a stakeholder group (perhaps some of the partners they identified). To follow their presentation, they may develop a short questionnaire, online survey, or lead a discussion to collect feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of their idea(s). Visit the YACH Project webpage at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach for further detail about designing a process evaluation using one of these tools.

CELEBRATE!

Don't forget to celebrate accomplishments! Ideas are available from the **adjourning section** of Pre-planning (page 16) or the **celebration section** of Evaluation (page 69).



Raise awareness

! HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

The activities in this section create opportunities for youth to involve other people in the process, helping them gain different perspectives as they learn more about the issue and the solution they are planning. Facilitators are encouraged to use the “Who? What? Why?” activity as a quick springboard to the “Fail Fast” activity. One helps youth put themselves into other people’s shoes, and the other allows those other people to speak for themselves. “Fail Fast,” in particular, helps the youth refine their ideas; support them in choosing a strategy that stretches them and feels doable.



Crucial questions

By the end of the **raise awareness** section, youth should be able to clearly answer the following questions. It is up to you as the adult facilitator to choose which activities you use from this section to support the youth in getting to those answers.

What have we learned about our issue or our proposed solution from raising awareness about them in the community?

How have we changed our proposed solution based on feedback from the community?

In both the **choosing your battle** and **making your action plan** phases, it can be easy for youth and their adult partners to get lost in the thinking, questions, and vision of what could be. **Raising awareness** can get overlooked.

It can help to think of this phase as a “reality check”—an opportunity to gain new perspectives from others, get feedback on ideas, build community support, and gain momentum for both planning and taking action. The key to understanding Raising Awareness is in knowing that it is not a separate step. It is integrated and embedded in the work of proofing the need and identifying partners. However, it is important to mention it separately, because it is such a vital step—the intentional process of building a two-way conversation with the community.

Raising awareness is where youth can really think through how they might communicate what they want for the community and how their partners

can support them. It is the time for youth to open themselves to the opinions and perspectives of others, some of whom agree and others who may not agree with their understanding of the issue. Considering all sides of an issue will help them to be increasingly thoughtful and sensitive—politically, culturally, and socially—about how they approach it. The more thoughtful their approach, the greater their likelihood of success.

This process can be very fun for engaged young people. In raising awareness, youth will be challenged to step outside of their social comfort zone and form relationships with others from their community. In previous YACH projects, youth reported that they enjoyed learning new things and building relationships with other community members when visiting the farmers market, volunteering at a food pantry, attending coalition meetings, meeting with food service directors, entering an art piece into a community fair and more.

This section includes two examples of efforts to raise awareness among community members and partners in YACH pilot projects. These pilot projects included efforts to improve food resource accessibility and increase physical activity behavior in the community. Additionally, one project was implemented in urban Madison, WI, and the other in rural Black River Falls, WI. Regardless of the community or issue, these examples hold lessons about raising awareness in the community. Later in this section, two activities are outlined to facilitate stepping outside the comfort zone and building relationships with community partners.

In the raising awareness process, you are the connector. As the adult facilitator, you work with community partners, and you also know additional stakeholders who have different but related objectives. Remember why you engaged with youth in the first place, and then share this sentiment with your partners; the whole community benefits when young people and adults work together. When you make these connections, you have an opportunity. You can:

- ▶ Deepen your own relationships with partners and individuals by involving youth-led action projects within these connections.
- ▶ Mentor youth about how to conduct themselves in professional settings.
- ▶ Share your experience about why a partner is of interest to the project and gain a new perspective.
- ▶ Increase the likelihood that a partnership is supportive and responsive by making introductions between youth and your partners.

Examples of raise awareness efforts from pilot project

In YACH pilot programs conducted between June and September of 2017, youth teams raised awareness for their identified community health issue in creative ways.

Black River Falls youth team

In the community of Black River Falls, youth identified the issue of limited access to physical activity due to misuse of a four-mile trail running through town. In the Raising awareness step of the project, the team created a survey intended for community members to report why they do not use the trail as a setting to be physically active. The survey was distributed in paper form at the Jackson County Fair and as an online survey shared by youth team members on Facebook. The results of this survey were linked with the **proofing the need** and **narrowing it down** steps of the project cycle. Surveying community members also raised awareness of the issue as they gathered input from their target audience. The youth team in Black River Falls continued to raise awareness of their project initiatives through meetings with public officials as they discussed the city's capacity to take action on their identified issues. In an interview with a contact from the City Department of Parks and Recreation, the youth brought attention and awareness to the issue at the local government level.

Madison youth team

Alternatively, the youth team that took action on healthy food access in the city of Madison raised awareness using fairly different strategies than their counterparts in Black River Falls. During the pilot, youth action in Madison involved installation of a garden at a low-income housing complex after youth interviewed residents about their preferences for contribution to the garden either as 'adopt a row' or community workdays. Interviewing community members raised awareness about the issue of food access among the target population. Further, the Madison youth interviewed community stakeholders at a local food cooperative and a neighborhood planning council. Presentation of and discussion about the issues with youth community members increased energy around the issue with these decision-making partners.





Who? What? and Why?

Pre-activity team-builders



- The distance between two people
- Five by five

When youth consider the different partners and stakeholders they identified during the relational mapping activity, they can think more deeply into what those groups or individuals are interested in about the issue, and why they might be interested. Understanding what motivates people will help youth understand how to share information with them.

Learning objectives

- Youth will learn how understanding people's motivations helps them understand the people themselves.
- Youth will learn to craft messages based on their understanding of people's motivations.

Materials needed

- The relational map created by the youth
- Flip chart paper
- Markers

Activity instructions

Ask the youth to select 3–5 groups or individuals listed on their relational map who seem to have the greatest interest, or “stake,” in their project or issue. Have them write each of those stakeholders at the top of a sheet of flip chart paper. Then draw a line down the center of the sheet. Title the left side, “What?” and the right side, “Why?” Then, ask the youth work in pairs to answer the following questions:

- What is the stakeholder most interested in related to the issue?
- Why are they interested in it?

Encourage them to note what they believe the answers to those questions are, how they came to believe that, and what questions they still have. How can they find out what they do not know about the stakeholders' motivations?

When they are finished, have them share their ideas with the other youth. Encourage the other youth to ask clarifying questions and add to their ideas.

Reflection questions

- What surprised you, if anything, in thinking about what motivated stakeholders?
- How does it help to understand other people's motivations?
- What will you change, if anything, in how you talk about your issue as a result of this activity?



Fail fast

Immendorf, M. et al. 2018

Pre-activity team-builders



- Team count
- What makes a good listener?

By this point in the process, the youth will no doubt have some ideas about how they want to address the issue they have identified. That makes it an ideal time for them to test the waters, before they have invested too much time in ideas that may not work.

The word “failure” has some negative connotations, probably because failure can be frustrating and sometimes painful after we have put a lot of time and energy into a project. That is why failing fast and failing early is best; it can save the youth a lot of time and trouble, help them refine their ideas, and increase their chance of success.

Learning objectives

- Youth will understand the value of failing fast and early in a process.
- Youth will learn from failure as a positive experience.
- Youth will gain experience in making short pitch presentations/public speaking.
- Youth will practice listening to understand.

Materials needed

- Storyboard drawings created by the youth (or other visual aids they choose)
- Notebook paper and pencils and/or computer

Optional introductory activity

Watch a couple minutes of this video: [Early U.S. Rocket and Space Launch Failures and Explosion](#). As it plays, explain to the youth that NASA failed a lot before they finally got it right. A lot! They started small—spending less money and less time at first—trying to launch a variety of rockets before they built shuttles for orbit or to take people into space. They “failed fast” so that they could learn from those experiences and get where they wanted to go.



Activity instructions

Have the youth choose someone they identified in the Who? What? and Why? activity to whom they would like to present their issue and ideas. A sample outline for their pitch presentation might look like this:

- Who are we? (30 seconds)
- Why are we here? (30 seconds)
- Summary of what we will share (20 seconds)
- The **problem** and the **vision**—youth might consider sharing their storyboards (1 minute)
- Proposed solution—choose only one solution to present (1 minute)
- Research conducted that supports the proposed solution (1 minute)
- Key unknowns or risks in the proposed solution (30 seconds)
- Ask the audience, “What excites or concerns you about our idea?”

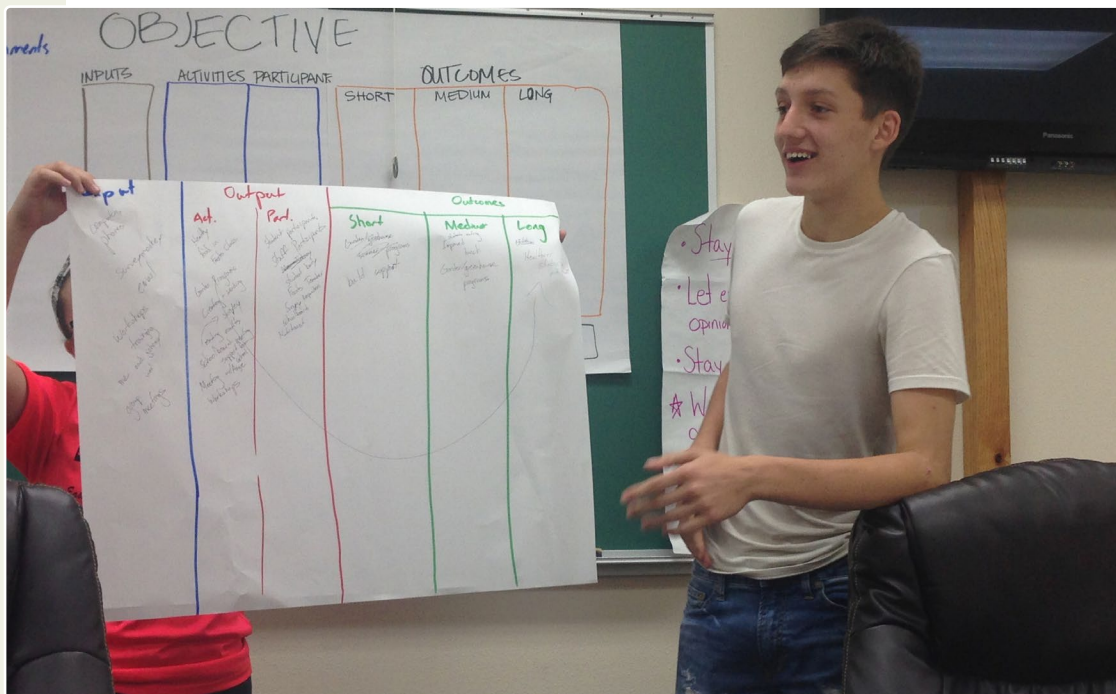
Encourage the youth to script and practice their presentation so they can stay as close to five minutes as possible. Keeping the presentation short allows them to present their idea clearly and concisely and allows much more time for them to listen, answer questions, and listen some more.

Remind the youth to listen—not to respond—but to really understand the stakeholders’ viewpoints. Have them take notes on the feedback they receive. Coach them as they assess what changes might be needed or if they should pursue a different approach to their issue. Then, encourage them to edit their pitch presentation and repeat this “fail fast” process as many times as necessary until they feel their proposed solution is ready for deeper planning.

Reflection questions

- What did you appreciate about hearing the stakeholders’ feedback about your idea?
- What did you learn in listening to understand their perspectives?
- What, if anything, do you think needs to change about your proposed solution?

Adaptations: If the youth do not feel ready to tackle public speaking, encourage them to think about how they could use video, social media or flyers to communicate their plan and “fail fast.”



Evaluation checkpoint

Youth self-assessment

Encourage youth to check-in with themselves before moving on to the next stage, **make an action plan**. Directions to lead a youth self-assessment through peer interviews are included at the end of the previous section, **choose your battle**. At this point, they should be able to clearly answer the following questions:

- ▶ What have we learned about our issue or our proposed solution from raising awareness about them in the community?
- ▶ How have we changed our proposed solution based on feedback from the community?
- ▶ If the youth do not have answers to either of these questions, encourage them to dig deeper to find those answers before moving on.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Choose one to three questions that are appropriate for your project from the **personal reflection section of Evaluation** and encourage the youth to think back on their experience so far. Reflections may be journaled or discussed either as a group or one-on-one. Keep these reflection times brief and thoughtful.



What we don't know

Most of the time, “we don’t know what we don’t know.” This means that there is always more to know, and we must make the best decisions we can based on the amount of information we have at the time. In the **raise awareness section**, the youth received feedback from the community to fill in some of what they did not know. However, some of that feedback may have led to additional questions.

Encourage the youth to take a few minutes at this point to **solo-storm** any additional questions that came up while they were raising awareness and any new information they feel may still be needed to move forward. Identifying gaps can be challenging and takes practice; you and the other adults may need to provide prompts and examples to help get the youth started.

Then, invite each youth to choose one of these items to research further and bring what they learn to the next meeting. They may choose to conduct another stakeholder interview, survey the community to gather more detailed information, use the Internet for research, or visit key sites to gather firsthand observations. Visit the **Evaluation section** of this guidebook and/or the YACH Project webpage at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach to find more specific resources about how to develop and use each of these evaluation tools.

CELEBRATE!

Don't forget to celebrate accomplishments! Ideas are available from the **adjourning section** of Pre-planning (page 16) or the **celebration section** of Evaluation (page 69).



Make an action plan

! HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

The activities in this section lead youth through use of tools that aid in the planning process. Writing S.M.A.R.T. goals and completing the action plan are vital. **Explore action planning with case studies** is an activity that can help youth understand the action planning processes, if needed. Similarly, ripple mapping is optional, offered as a nonlinear, more creative way to help youth identify steps that can be filled into the action plan later. Finally, logic modeling is a related structure that, if you think it can help, is available online at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach.



Crucial questions

By the end of the **make an action plan** section, youth should be able to clearly answer the following questions.

What detailed steps must we take to achieve our vision?

What resources—human, financial, material—will we need to complete those steps?

What is the big picture community impact we are hoping for?

What is the timeline of our project? Is it realistic? How do we know?

When we implement the plan (in the next phase), how will we know we have been successful?

After all the pre-planning, team building, choosing a battle, and raising awareness, something must be done, action must be taken, but not without a plan. The action plan will clearly lay out each step in tackling the chosen battle, including the timeline for completion, role of individual team members, required supplies, and indication of success. Evaluation of previous YACH projects indicates that action planning is sometimes seen as “boring” by the youth. From this, we learned that when adult facilitators help youth understand how earlier steps feed into action planning, their engagement is higher and more positive.

As such, by this point, about half of the action plan should be complete with work the youth have already done. Because of that work, they likely already have

a good idea of what needs to be done to achieve their goals. So, the facilitator may act as a guide to make sure their plan is thorough, their activities lead to their goals, they know what resources they need, their timelines are realistic, and there is someone assigned to accomplish each task. If they get stuck in the planning process, circle back to earlier work they did and help them recall what they have learned that can help them, and who they have met who can answer questions that come up. In this way, you can support them in building confidence in and empower them in their planning.

If your group members are engaged, informed, and empowered to take action, then use the activities below to help the youth create thoughtful and practical plans for action.

- ▶ **S.M.A.R.T. goals** are a way for youth to set goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, time-bound, and lead to actions. Every one of these components increases the likelihood of success in accomplishing their goals.
- ▶ **Action planning** is a process to detail planned steps to help achieve a previously determined goal. A template and activity are included to help youth move the rest of the way through the vital process of writing an action plan.
- ▶ **Ripple mapping** is a creative, nonlinear way to visualize our project plan; similar to a mind map, it offers two ways to help with action to planning process:
 - For creative thinkers, it is a more visual way to begin to build the action plan. In this case, start with activities and plan forward. Then youth can simply paste their ideas into the more structured action plan.
 - It is also a way to check their action plan after it is complete. In this case, start with outcomes and plan backwards. This backward glance can help identify planning gaps.

Do not be afraid to challenge assumptions made by youth group members. Previously, your role as the adult facilitator has been to guide the youth through the process of discovery and building relationships. Now it is time to use your expertise to ensure that intended actions and identified goals will hold up with stakeholders and achieve the desired outcomes.

Setting S.M.A.R.T. goals

It is not enough to have broad, open-ended goals. Lofty, unattainable goals get us nowhere. It is important to set realistic goals and know when those goals have been reached. Goals that are S.M.A.R.T. can help.

Yet most of us do not set goals this way. Consider the typical New Year's resolution. Each December, as January 1st and the promise of a fresh start approaches, many people reflect on the year that is closing and their life overall. Most people set resolutions, intentions, and mantras to carry with them into the New Year to achieve all their dreams and wishes. Most New Year's resolutions fail by February, and it is not because of lack of interest or will. Most often, this happens because old habits resurface in times of stress, challenge, and hardship.

S.M.A.R.T. model of goal-setting

New Year's resolutions are much like regular, everyday goals that are set for making it to work on time, saving money on groceries, and turning in projects. To successfully achieve our goals, we follow the S.M.A.R.T. goals model (Hobson, A. and L. Pettersen 2008). S.M.A.R.T. goals are:

- ▶ Specific
- ▶ Measurable
- ▶ Achievable
- ▶ Results-focused
- ▶ Time-bound

Goals set without these standards in place most likely will fail. As youth create their action plans, encourage a focus on setting S.M.A.R.T. goals destined for success and positive outcomes.



Set S.M.A.R.T goals

Learning objectives

- Youth will learn to set S.M.A.R.T. goals.
- Youth will apply what they learned to develop S.M.A.R.T. goals for their project.

Materials needed

- S.M.A.R.T. goals concept definitions
- Make your goals S.M.A.R.T. goals worksheet
- Writing utensils

Activity instructions

1. Read definitions and examples of S.M.A.R.T. concepts with youth. Use one of the examples on the S.M.A.R.T. Concepts handout to have youth practice identifying the five parts of a S.M.A.R.T. goal.
2. Then, provide the youth with the “Make your goals S.M.A.R.T. goals” worksheet. Ask them to practice writing a S.M.A.R.T. goal by writing a personal goal for themselves. It could be about performance in school, activities like sports and clubs, or good health behaviors such as drinking water or eating fruits and vegetables. Lead youth in responding to prompts on the S.M.A.R.T. goals worksheet.

REMINDER

Encourage the youth to focus on PSE change when they write their S.M.A.R.T. goals. When they focus on changes to policies, how systems operate, or the built environment, their work will have a greater positive impact for more community members.

Reflection questions

- How did the goals of your work change when you evaluated them using the S.M.A.R.T. goal framework?
- Do you think you are more or less likely to achieve project outcomes when goals are framed using S.M.A.R.T. concepts? Why or why not?
- Are you likely to use the S.M.A.R.T. goals framework when you set goals in the future (for individual or team goals)? Why or why not?

Action plan template and tools

To this point, the youth have done a lot of brainstorming and thinking. In action planning, concrete expectations will be set for completing activities and details of project implementation including timeline, resources, and evaluation methods. A detailed action plan helps youth stay on track for completing project activities, and also increases the chances that partners will support their efforts.

Youth will have an opportunity to practice action planning by reviewing case studies of youth-led action by project teams from Wisconsin and beyond. Pilot program project action plans are also available to look at. The activities provided here end with the youth creating a detailed action plan. Finally, the template guides youth through the process of writing a thorough, detailed plan for action.



ACTION PLAN ALERT

The youth may add their S.M.A.R.T. goals to the Action Plan when they have completed this activity.

Action plan components

A **general information** section includes youth-led team name; county name and county Extension office address and phone number; and the names and contact information of all youth and adult participants.

The **project abstract** provides, in one page or less, answers to eight questions that help youth create a short summary of the project. The abstract includes a brief description of the issue and need for action, a summary of goals and plan, and a preview of action they plan to take. Note: Write the abstract last, after the rest of the action plan is complete.

The **situation** section specifies an initiative name, project dates, a description of the community and its assets, the issue they hope to address, and S.M.A.R.T. goals.

A **detailed plan of action** allows youth to break down the activities and outcomes of each S.M.A.R.T. goal individually. Within each S.M.A.R.T. goal set for project work, youth will list activities, who will be responsible for the activities, resources needed, and the timeframe. The outcomes are what the youth hope to achieve in the short-, medium-, and long-term. They are what youth will evaluate to determine if they have been successful in achieving their S.M.A.R.T. goals.

- ▶ **Short-term outcomes** are the immediate products that results from completion of activities; most often these are changes in knowledge, skills or awareness (for example, the community creates a space for a community garden).
- ▶ **Medium-term outcomes**, in community health work, are typically changes in behavior among individuals or policy, system and environment factors that influence behavior (for example, community members rent garden plots, they eat more fruits and vegetables).
- ▶ **Long-term outcomes** are population-level changes like a reduction of cardiovascular disease incidence. It is typically difficult to measure outcomes, because they occur over periods of time that are longer than the timelines of community health work (for example, obesity and diabetes decrease in the community as a result of increased fruit and vegetable consumption).

To achieve the S.M.A.R.T. goals, a detailed plan of **activities**, including **who** will complete them, **by when** and with **what resources** is vital. Each activity will be tied to an outcome. Those outcomes help youth identify the signs to look for so they know if they have successfully achieved the S.M.A.R.T. goal. **Evaluation** is the strategy they will use to measure that success. This is the heart of the planning process.

Finally, a completed action plan requires a **budget** that lists itemized expenses of activities with information on price, quantity, and purpose as it relates to the activities.

Visit the [Make Your Action Plan section of the YACH webpage](#) to find an action plan template that youth project teams may use to work through the action planning activity on the next page and to create their own action plan. The template outlines key elements that should be included, but it can be added to, reformatted, or changed in any way that helps the youth explain their detailed action plan.





Explore action planning with case studies

One lesson learned from the 2017 YACH pilot project was that development of a youth-led action plan was a daunting task for individual members of project teams until a blank action plan template was made available. After project members knew what was expected from them in the action planning process, they got to work planning and writing about project goals and activities! The completed action plans submitted by pilot program teams impressed program coordinators beyond even the highest expectations for youth-led action work.

In this example, youth will work through the uncomfortable and new process of action planning by detailing the work of other youth-led project teams.

This action planning practice exercise will ease project teams into the planning process with case studies on the YACH Project webpage at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach. There is no right answer to this exercise, and youth will likely need to fill in some details as not all information about community needs assessments or project design and implementation is available. Youth should be encouraged to put themselves in the shoes of team members of the case studies analyzed here. Ask them to consider, “What would you have done in each situation?”

Learning objectives

- Youth will increase their level of confidence with the action planning process.
- Youth will apply action planning processes to a case study.

Materials needed

- [Blank action plan](#)
- [Case studies](#)

Activity instructions

1. Read one of the youth-led community health work case studies found on the YACH Project webpage at blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach.
2. With the youth, read through the descriptions of the [Action Plan components \(page 48\)](#).
3. Using the blank action plan, ask youth to create an action plan based on one of the case studies.
4. If more practice is needed, choose another youth-led community health work case study to read and repeat the action planning process with the second example.

Adaptation: If teamwork and small group cohesion is a priority, case studies may be assigned to small groups to work on separately. In this case, completed action plans should be presented and shared back to the larger group so all members hear about different case studies. If time is tight, choose the most relevant case study.

Reflection questions

- What was challenging about creating this action plan?
- What, if any, additional information did you feel you needed?
- What did you learn about the action planning process through this exercise?

ACTION PLAN ALERT

At this point, the youth have likely completed many sections of the Action Plan. Celebrate that important work and progress! By the end of this activity, they'll have a complete Action Plan they can use to move forward with implementation.

Sample action plan review

Learning objectives

- Youth will practice analyzing an action plan.
- Youth will identify action planning strategies for use in their own project.

Materials needed

- [Sample action plan](#)

Activity instructions

In pairs, youth will read the sample action plan. Explain that the best action plans are written in a way that anyone could pick up the plan and implement it, even if they were not part of the planning. The youth are going to analyze how the plan was written. They will identify strengths of the plan and areas where the plan could be improved. Use the following questions as prompts:

- What aspects of the plan make it possible for you to imagine how you could implement the plan if you were in that community?
- What questions do you have about how the plan would be implemented? What parts of the plan need more detail?

Reflection questions

- What action plan writing strategies did you learn from analyzing the plan?
- How might these strategies help you in writing your own plan?



Create your action plan

Youth may use [the action plan template](#) (available on [YACH Project webpage](#)) to create their action plan. A few guidelines that might help them include:

- Change the template format as needed, but make sure to include required components.
- Assume the audience does not know anything about the project team, identified issue, primary objectives, and intended action.
- Make it clear how and why activities will occur, and the logic between implementation of activities and achievement of objectives.
- Be as concise and to the point as possible.
- Share action plans with project coordinators and community partners to get feedback.

Visualize your plan

Ripple mapping: A different way of looking at your action plan

While participants may already have the skills to create action plans and implement changes in their communities, starting their action plan may seem daunting. One strategy to help youth to start is to encourage them to visualize the plan.



Warm up activity: Visualizing a plan

Learning objective

- Youth will explore action planning by imagining a familiar project.

Materials needed

- Whiteboard or flip chart paper
- Markers

Activity instructions

1. Read the following short script:
 - **Scenario:** Imagine it is a week before the first day of your freshman year of high school. You want everything to be just right. You have a few friends who are already there and a few friends who are new to the high school like you are. You have one week to get yourself completely ready for the first day.
2. Write the words “First Day of High School” at the top of the whiteboard or flip chart. Write “Activities” underneath it. Then, ask, “What things do you need to do to make sure you are ready for the first day of school?” Write their responses down the left side. Make sure they think about their clothing, books, schedule, locker, homeroom, etc.
3. Next to Activities, write “Resources”. Ask, “What resources do you need for each of these activities?”. Write their responses to the right of the activities.
4. Next to Resources, write “By when?”. Ask, “When do you need those resources?”. Write their responses next to the resources.
5. Next to Resources, write “Who?”. Ask, “Who can help you get the resources you need?”. Write their responses.
6. (Optional) If time allows, ask what the Outcomes might be and how they might evaluate those outcomes and write those responses on the paper or whiteboard.

Warm up alternative: Visualizing your plan for any scenario is integral to success. In fact, professional athletes spend time meditating before any competition. Athletes in individual sports like running, rock climbing, swimming, cycling, figure skating, skiing, bowling, track and field, and golf may spend hours imagining what they will do to prepare, how they will start, the challenges that will come up, each step of the event, how their event will finish, and the way they will feel when they achieve their goal. Michael Phelps, Olympic gold medalist, has mastered visualization. Show the youth this short video about his visualization practice: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Htw780vHH0o>. Then remind them that this visualization is similar to a very short action plan. Visualize Your Plan

Ripple mapping

Ripple mapping is another kind of visual process to plan required actions, inputs, and outcomes to achieve a goal. It might help youth to think of inputs and outputs of their actions as rocks that have been skipped across the surface of a lake.

When a rock—all the youths’ actions (planned or otherwise)—skips across a calm body of water, ripples spread out like tiny waves from each point of contact the rock makes with the water. As the ripples appear and travel, water far from the place where the rock touched is affected by the impact.

Just like a rock skipped across the water, community health work has both intended and unintended impacts on organizations, communities, and individuals. Ripple mapping is a tool to consider all potential outcomes, and can be utilized in planning before work begins, to evaluate after work is completed, or both. Youth may use the activity below before doing the action plan if activities, outcomes, and deadlines are unfamiliar. Or, if they breezed through the action-planning process, the exercise of ripple-mapping—worked from outcomes backward to inputs—may help them to see new things.



Ripple mapping

Youth may be familiar with an activity like ripple mapping: creating a mind map that demonstrates many relationships in a story.

Learning objectives

- Youth will think critically about activities, inputs, and outcomes.
- Youth will learn to make connections between project elements to get a sense of the potential impact.

Materials needed

- Large sheet of paper (several poster papers or butcher paper) or whiteboard
- Markers

Activity instructions

1. Write one planned activity in the center of the paper.
2. Consider the inputs required to implement this activity, the participants that will be involved in it, and the outcomes expected. Draw arrows into or away from the activity to demonstrate the relationship between factors. Ask the youth: what will you need? (inputs), how will you do it? (break it down into smaller tasks or activities), and what do you expect to happen as a result? (outcomes).
3. Create a relationship (a line between two things on the map) between expected outcomes and the community the action is designed to help.
4. Consider any unintended outcomes. Could the activities have impacted the group neither planned nor desired (i.e., side-effects)? What populations are affected by these outcomes? Ask them what else might happen as a result? and who else might this affect? Draw dotted relationship lines between unintended outcomes and activities.
5. Repeat steps 1-4 for all planned activities. Make connections between existing elements in your map (i.e., supplies required for a specific activity is connected to another activity rather than added to the map twice).
6. Assess all factors and relationships (arrows with directionality) on your ripple-map.
7. If the youth do the ripple map first, encourage them to put their ideas into the more linear action plan format at this point to ensure it still makes sense to them.

Reflection questions

- What new, if any, unplanned inputs, activities, participants, and outcomes did you discover in creating a ripple map?
- In what ways is your work interconnected with that of other community organizations?
- What unplanned impacts of youth-led action work did you discover by creating a ripple map?

Evaluation checkpoint

Youth self-assessment

Encourage youth to check-in with themselves before moving on to the next stage, Implement Your Action Plan. Directions to lead a youth self-assessment with peer interviewing are included at the end of the **choose your battle section**. At this point, they should be able to clearly answer the following questions:

- ▶ What detailed steps must we take to achieve our vision?
- ▶ What resources—human, financial, material—will we need to complete those steps?
- ▶ What is the big picture community impact we are hoping for?
- ▶ What is the timeline of our project? Is it realistic? How do we know?
- ▶ When we implement the plan (in the next phase), how will we know we have been successful?

If the youth do not have answers to these questions, encourage them to dig deeper and add needed details to their ideas. Without a clear understanding of every detail of the aspect of their planned actions, they are likely to struggle during implementation.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Choose one to three questions that are appropriate for your project from the **personal reflection section of Evaluation** and encourage the youth to think back on their experience so far. Reflections may be journaled or discussed either as a group or one-on-one. Keep these reflection times brief and thoughtful.



Ask the experts

Help the youth identify three to five community experts who provide or seek funding for health-related projects. Encourage the youth to contact the experts, asking them to review their action plan and provide constructive feedback. The youth should provide background about the project so the experts understand the purpose, timeline and expectations of the project. Then, they may ask the experts to provide either written or verbal feedback about the following questions:

- What do you see as the strengths of this action plan?
- What suggestions do you have to improve the plan?

Encourage the experts to be as specific and constructive as possible, letting them know that this is a learning opportunity for the youth.

Facilitate a discussion with the youth about what feedback they may want to act on.

CELEBRATE!

Don't forget to celebrate accomplishments! Ideas are available from the **adjourning section** of Pre-planning (page 16) or the **celebration section** of Evaluation (page 69).



Implement your plan

! HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

For the most part, implementation is just what it says—acting on the plan the youth have developed. That and a couple other key elements are described in detail in the next few pages. The activities that follow are not meant to replace action on the project or add extra work to the process. Rather, they are troubleshooting support for the work being done by youth. Each activity is tied to a short scenario designed to help the youth identify skills and decision-making strategies many of them already use. After a discussion of the scenario, the activity guides them in how to apply the skills in new ways.

If needed and as needed, choose the activity that helps the youth get and stay on track with their own action plan implementation. Pair that activity with the case study or studies that seem most applicable to the learning they might need.



Crucial questions

By the end of the **implement your plan** section, youth should be able to clearly answer the following questions.

How did we take action to implement our plan?

How did we evaluate to ensure our effort was successful?

If evaluation showed something was not working as we had planned, what changes were needed to ensure effective implementation?

How did we communicate our results?

What response did we receive, if any?

What do we mean by implementation?

Implementation pulls together all the work the youth have done to this point. The community assessment, awareness-raising, research, questioning, brainstorming, and mapping have all been collected into a cohesive plan.

At this point, some youth will feel as though they have been ready to take action for a long time. Others may feel as though they will never be ready. Whatever they may be feeling, what a good plan needs more than anything else is to be put into action.

Implementation includes three crucial elements:

- **Taking action.** Moving forward with the combination of steps youth leaders have decided will help them achieve their goals. The steps vary

depending on the group and their plan. The steps may also need to change based on evaluation and/or feedback they receive along the way.

- **Evaluating success.** Some people believe that evaluation is something you do at the end of a project. In fact, it is something to be done throughout a project to both measure and help ensure success.
- **Communicating results.** Youth can maximize the impact of their good work by sharing results with many different stakeholders, including the media, creating a ripple effect throughout the community as more people learn about their project.

We will examine each of these in more detail in the following pages.

Taking action

Limited guidance can be provided for the “taking action” part of implementation. Encourage and support youth in following their action plan. A few suggestions as they begin:

Whenever possible, let forward momentum carry the youth to the next step.

Implementation tends to be the highest energy portion of any project. This is where all the youths’ ideas and excitement take shape and begin to carry them forward. Make the most of that energy. Do not try to rein in that momentum unless there is a specific, identified reason to slow things down.

If the youth get stuck during implementation, support them in taking another look at their plan.

Despite our best efforts at planning, sometimes vital steps get missed. The checkpoints associated with evaluation and communicating results can help youth identify problems. However, at this point, remind them that perfect implementation of a perfect plan is impossible. Throughout this process, youth must focus on the intended outcomes they have identified and understand that flexibility can help them to achieve their goal.

When (not if) the unexpected happens, reflect and respond.

The unexpected is inevitable in any project that involves people. In experiential learning, youth learn by doing and reflecting. Open-ended questions are our best tool for helping youth work through a process of reflecting on what has taken place, brainstorming possible solutions or responses, and making the best choice or choices for how to move forward.

Evaluating success

Evaluation during the implementation phase of the project should inform the process, not slow it down. For that reason, simple methods are recommended to help ensure and assess success. A few suggested methods might include:

- ▶ **Tracking.** Counting contacts with participants, changes in usership, or amounts of food being distributed are examples of the types of data that can be gathered to inform how a project is going. Baseline data may need to be gathered for comparison depending on the project.
- ▶ **Youth observations.** Encourage youth to pay attention to how things are going. During meetings, hold short discussions focused on questions such as: What is working? What is not working? What could be improved on? What are you proud of?
- ▶ **Short feedback forms.** Think of a hotel or restaurant feedback form. Typically postcard size, it includes several brief questions that can be answered with a checkmark plus an opportunity to comment in more detail if needed. A great deal of information can be gathered from project participants in a short time.
- ▶ **Key informant check-ins.** Identify a few frequent participants or other key stakeholders for short (less than 5 minutes) conversations about what is working and what is not.

Work with the youth to determine the best methods based on their project. Keep in mind how much time may be needed for youth to compile data if feedback forms or tracking are the chosen methods. Consider how the data and feedback they collect can support the next element of implementation, communicating results.

Communicating results

The community-level changes being initiated by the youth can grow in effectiveness and impact when they inform stakeholders, partners, funders, and/or the community at large. The more people who know about their efforts, the more that others may support them. Consider the ripple effect as we described it earlier in the guidebook; the youths' work is a drop in the water and their efforts can ripple out to impact more and more community members.

For effective communication, consider the following issues and related questions:

Audience: We do not speak to an elder the same way we speak to a peer. So how do we communicate change based on who we are speaking with? Consider these questions:

- ▶ Who needs or wants information about their project?
- ▶ What is the best way to communicate with that audience?

Message: The message is what information you want the audience to know. Not all audiences are interested in the same information, so your message may vary from one audience to the next. No matter who your audience is, the key message should be brief and to the point; in other words, keep it simple. Consider these questions:

- ▶ What do you want your audience to know?
- ▶ Why does it matter to them?

Medium: The medium is how the message is communicated to the audience. Now, more than ever before, we have choices about how to distribute our message. Consider these questions.

- ▶ What is the most effective method to get a message to the audience you have chosen?
- ▶ What do you know about how they get their information? Consider age, finances, habits, or other factors that may affect their use of various media (newspapers, radio, television, social media, word of mouth, etc.)

When the youth have their audience, message and medium defined, encourage the use of photos, quotes, data, and/or text to communicate relatively simple but important concepts.



Troubleshooting activities for implementing your plan

The six *optional* activities in this section are intentionally brief, so they do not detract from the action the youth are taking. These troubleshooting activities are matched to a challenge youth might experience during the implementation phase of their project; and, by working through the activity, youth may identify solutions to the barrier they face. Each activity includes a simple scenario of youth stepping up to a real-life challenge (feel free to replace the provided scenario with another that the youth might identify with more closely). Then the activity and reflection questions prompt them toward problem solving approaches.

CHALLENGE 1

Difficulty getting started

When the plan is in place, youth may still have trouble getting started with their project. Maybe they are overwhelmed by all they have planned, or perhaps the first step is a big one. Whatever the reason, it may help to know that they have likely navigated a similar situation in their day-to-day lives. This activity encourages them to apply their skills to the project.

Scenario

You were just assigned a big research project at school and your work group composed of four students needs to get started. You have your topic and the first big step is to pull together all the research you can.

- ▶ How might your work group break down that first big step into smaller steps?
- ▶ What are some of the small steps you might start with?
- ▶ How will you divide the small steps so everyone is involved and helping?

Now apply the same idea to the first big step of your project.

Break down your project's first big step

Breaking big steps into smaller, more doable tasks can help us make real progress toward our goal without feeling overwhelmed.

Learning objectives

- Youth will practice identifying smaller tasks within a larger action step.
- Youth will share responsibilities for carrying out the smaller tasks to accomplish the larger action step together.

Materials needed

- Post-it notes
- Markers

Activity instructions

Discuss, if needed, and write the first big step so everyone can see it. Then, make a list of smaller tasks—for example, contacts you need to make, supplies to pick up, marketing materials to develop, etc.—that are needed for the group to achieve the larger action step. Then think about the strengths of members of your team. Who is the best person to take on each of the smaller tasks involved in taking the first big step? When should the tasks be completed? Which tasks are needed before the next small task can be started? Write one response on each Post-it note so they can be arranged and re-arranged as needed.

Reflection questions

- What was it like to look at your larger action step in terms of smaller tasks?
- Does it change how you feel about first/next steps in your project?
- How might this strategy help in other areas of your project? Your life?



CHALLENGE 2

Implementation is not going as planned

Mayday! Mayday! Something is not working.... Even our best plans do not always work out exactly as we imagine them. Weather, schedules, and people can be unpredictable, and we must be flexible to change how we work with them.

Scenario

You and your friends are planning a surprise party for another friend. When you get to the day of the party, you all realize that you talked about getting a cake but forgot to order one. It is too late to order one now.

- ▶ What could you have at the party instead of cake? Challenge yourselves to come up with as many ideas as possible.
- ▶ What else do you need to consider? For example, on a hot day, ice cream will melt without a cooler. Name other important conditions and then consider them for all possible cake alternatives.
- ▶ How will you decide which is the best idea? How will you rule out ideas that will not work?

Now, use this brainstorming activity to create a list of possible ways to solve an issue happening in your project.

Brainstorm Alternatives

It is normal to feel stuck or trapped when things do not go as planned. The important thing to remember is that, while we cannot go the way we expected, there is (almost) always another way forward.

Learning objectives

- Youth will explore a variety of problem-solving perspectives about an issue.
- Youth will practice deciding on the best choice.

Materials needed

- Whiteboard or flip chart paper
- Markers

Activity instructions:

Draw a circle on a flip chart page or whiteboard and section it off like a pizza with eight pieces. As a group, brainstorm possible solutions for the situation, writing one idea in each wedge. Even if you think you have a workable solution, keep going until you have filled each wedge with an idea. Even a “bad” idea might have attractive factors that could inform the solution that is eventually chosen. Then, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each idea, narrowing it down to the best one (which may still not be perfect and that is okay).

Reflection questions

- How do you feel about the solution the group has chosen?
- What is good about needing to figure out so many possible solutions? What was bad about it?
- How could you use this strategy in other areas of life?



CHALLENGE 3

We do not know how this project is going

When we are busy doing a project, it can be hard—and helpful—to take a step back and observe. If we do not take time to observe our project objectively though, we might be missing important details that impact the success of the project. Trying to view the project or activities from a new perspective can help.

Scenario

When you get home, your brother/sister is in trouble because they came home late last night without calling. Your brother/sister said they had been busy and had simply lost track of time. You were home last night and saw your parents/caregivers pacing the hall and checking the clocks.

- ▶ What is your perspective in this situation?
- ▶ What is your brother's/sister's perspective? In their shoes, how might you feel?
- ▶ What is the parents/caregiver's perspective? In their shoes, how might you feel?

When we consider others' opinions on our work or the challenges we face, we may realize that other people look at the same situation in different ways. Put yourself in someone else's shoes in relation to your project and consider the work you are doing from another perspective.

Putting on someone else's shoes

Learning objectives

- Youth will explore multiple points of view in looking at their project.
- Youth will learn about important information gained from exploring new perspectives.

Materials needed

- Paper
- Pen/pencil
- Clipboard

Activity instructions

Identify 3-5 key stakeholder positions in your project. For each stakeholder role, list 2-3 things that might be important to them about your project. Based on those ideas of what might be important, take turns observing your project from the different perspectives. For example, perhaps one day, two youth leaders may be volunteering at the local Farmer's Market educating customers about produce options and recipes. A third youth leader attends the Farmer's Market to observe, watching the interactions from the perspective of a customer. Based on what you think is important to customers, what do you notice about how youth leaders are interacting with market-goers? You may notice positive things or things to improve on. Try to repeat this activity multiple times from other perspectives.

Reflection questions

- What was it like to observe the project from a different point of view?
- What did you learn from taking a new perspective on the project?
- What action might you take based on what you learned?



CHALLENGE 4

Participants are not satisfied

You might think things are going along perfectly with your project, and they may well be... from your perspective. Maybe you have even done the previous activity and tried to see things from the participant's perspective. But how do you know for sure? You may have to ask.

Scenario

You and your friends are planning what to do for the weekend. The last two weekends, you have done all the same things you usually do. You know you will probably do the same things again, but everyone is in the mood to change it up a little. They will do whatever you say, but you want to know what they think, too.

- ▶ What question(s) would you ask to find out what things your friends want to keep doing this weekend?
- ▶ What question(s) would you ask to find out what things they might want to change?
- ▶ How would you use their input to come to a decision?

It's all in how you ask the question

Learning objectives

- Youth will learn about asking open-ended questions to gain feedback.
- Youth will gather input from participants about their project.
- Youth will apply what they learn from participants to improve their project.

Materials needed

- Paper
- Pencils
- Clipboard(s)

Activity instructions

There are two main ways we recommend youth gather quick feedback from participants: brief survey cards or key informant check-ins. Encourage the youth to think about what they want to know from participants. Most often, they will want to focus on no more than three to five simple questions about what is working, what is not working and suggestions for improvement. When they have drafted their questions, they can decide which of those two methods (or another one that makes sense from the Evaluation Section) will work best to gather feedback about their project. Remind the youth that all feedback is a gift, and even seemingly negative feedback helps their project.

Reflection questions

- How does it feel to get feedback directly from participants?
- What was the most useful feedback you received?
- How will you use the feedback to improve your project?



CHALLENGE 5

It's hard to reach the right audience

Correctly matching an audience to the best medium to reach them can be tricky. Youth will need to learn more about the people around them and how they like to communicate, which is especially challenging now since people receive information in so many different ways these days.

Scenario

You are helping your stepmom plan a graduation party for your older sister. It is not going to be a very big party, but your stepmom really wants some of your sister's friends to attend as well as family members, including your older aunts, uncles, and grandpa.

- ▶ What is the best way to invite your sister's friends to the party? What words would you use to ask them to come?
- ▶ What is the best way to invite older family members to the party, knowing some of them do not have computers? What words would you use to ask them to come?
- ▶ Why do you think you might choose different methods to communicate with different groups of people?

The matching game

Learning objectives

- Youth will learn about how to reach different stakeholders using different media.
- Youth will identify appropriate communication strategies for reaching their audience.

Materials needed

- Paper
- Pencils
- Clipboard(s)

Activity instructions

Ask the youth to create a list of stakeholder groups (or audiences) who they want to inform about their project and have them write those groups down the left-hand side of a flip chart or whiteboard. On the right side, have them list different media they have access to (they might list some or all of the following: newspapers, newsletters, television, radio, web pages, social media (which ones?), email, word of mouth, or others). Draw lines from the audience to the media that are the best ways to reach each audience. Hint: There may be more than one media type per audience group.

Reflection questions

- How does it help (or not help) to identify appropriate media for different audiences?
- What is your next step in communicating with these audiences?



CHALLENGE 6

Narrowing down a message

The best messages are brief and focused. They are clear, communicate one key point, and are concise. After the youth determine their main message, depending on the media they are using, they can add more information, but any additional details must support that main message.

Scenario

A friend of yours, someone who is not in your closest circle but still a friend, has a boyfriend/girlfriend. You saw their boyfriend/girlfriend with someone else, and you think they need to know so they do not get hurt worse later. You decide to tell them, and believe it is better to be honest with them, without including details that will hurt them unnecessarily. Pretend you have all the details on the situation and answer the following questions:

- ▶ What is the main thing you want your friend to know?
- ▶ What are the supporting details of the story? In other words, what does the friend need to know? Why is it better if they do not know?
- ▶ How did you make decisions about what to include or not include?

Tweet about it

Learning objectives

- Youth will learn how to be clear and concise in creating a message.
- Youth will apply what they learned to create a clear message about their project.

Materials needed

- Large paper
- Markers
- Tape

Activity instructions

Ask the youth what they would want people to know about their project if all they had was 140 characters, the length of a tweet on Twitter. Ask them to work in pairs to develop a tweet about their project, focusing on what they think is the most important message about their project.

Ask them to share their tweets with the rest of the group and discuss the different messages.

Which one or two messages do they think communicates the clearest, most informative message about their project? What parts of other tweets need to be part of their collective tweet? Challenge the youth to narrow their work down to one or two tweets, or main messages. Then, they can begin to consider which audience and media match from the previous activity will be the best way to communicate their message.

Reflection questions

- How easy or difficult was it to write a short, clear message?
- How might you make changes to this short, clear message to share about your project in the newspaper? On social media? On the radio? On a website?



Evaluation checkpoint

Youth self-assessment

Encourage youth to check-in with themselves before moving on to the next stage, **evaluate your plan**. Directions to lead a youth self-assessment with peer interviewing are included at the end of the **choose your battle section**. At this point, they should be able to clearly answer the following questions:

- ▶ How did we take action to implement our plan?
- ▶ How did we evaluate to ensure our effort was successful?
- ▶ If evaluation showed something was not working as we had planned, what changes were needed to ensure effective implementation?
- ▶ How did we communicate our results?
- ▶ What response did we receive, if any?

If the youth are missing answers to any of these questions, encourage them to dig deeper and apply any implementation steps—especially evaluating success or communicating results—that might be missing.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Choose one to three questions that are appropriate for your project from the **personal reflection section of Evaluation** and encourage the youth to think back on their experience so far. Reflections may be journaled or discussed either as a group or one-on-one. Keep these reflection times brief and thoughtful.



What do we have to celebrate?

Celebration is a way to acknowledge strengths of individuals and the team, to share observations about the changes or impacts they have seen in the community and congratulate themselves on a job well done.

Encourage the youth to solo-storm as they have done many times during the project. This time, ask them to write down one idea per piece of paper in response to the following questions:

- What is a strength you noticed in one of the other youths? How have they used it to support the project? Be specific and do not forget to include the other youth members' names. Write at least one note about each team member.
- What is a change or impact you noticed as a result of the project? This can be at an individual or community level.
- What are you most proud of? Again, this can be related to something you are proud of accomplishing yourself or something the group achieved.

Put all ideas into a basket. Then, invite the youth to pull a paper out and read it aloud to the group. Continue taking turns until all papers have been read, allowing youth to keep positive notes about themselves if they choose. Are any of the ideas they wrote down possible messages they could share with the community?

CELEBRATE!

Don't forget to celebrate accomplishments! Ideas are available from the **adjourning section** of Pre-planning (page 16) or the **celebration section** of Evaluation (page 69).



Evaluate your plan



HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

This section does not stand alone. As we have already established, evaluation should take place throughout the process. The evaluation section acts as a resource and a supplement to all other sections. Use it throughout the process as needed.

If the youth need more information about how to select the appropriate tool, look here. If they are not sure how to analyze the data they have gathered, more information is available here. If they need to know more about how to share their data in the community, there is additional guidance here. This section also includes resource cards for possible evaluation methods that youth may want to use and refers to the [YACH Project webpage](#) for detailed explanations and examples.



Crucial questions

By the time you reach this section, youth should have used a variety of evaluation methods. So, the crucial questions at this point are designed to help them reflect on how evaluation helped them during their project and how it will help them and their community in the future. Based on the evaluation they have conducted through the project, the youth should be able to clearly answer the following questions.

What was your impact on the community health issue you selected in the first phase of the project?

What data have you gathered through evaluation that demonstrates your impact?

Based on the results of your evaluation both during and at the end of the project, what recommendations do you have for future projects or community health efforts?

What data have you gathered that supports your recommendations?

With whom might you share your impact, your recommendations, and the related data?

How could you share the related data?

How might sharing these things with stakeholders increase your project's impact?

Foundations of evaluation

Evaluation is really a way of asking, “How do we know we’ve been successful so far?” and discovering answers to that question. The way youth gather those answers depends on the project, who they are asking, and what resources they have available.

Evaluation is an important part of each action stage, from beginning to end.

Process evaluation

Throughout the project, it is important to reflect and document processes that are working well, and things that are not effective. By evaluating the process, youth can adapt to challenges, and make sure they are taking all the necessary steps to achieve your overall goal.

For example, when they are raising awareness of their project by presenting to their peers or other community stakeholders, they gather feedback by taking notes about the discussion of their presentation and/or using a short evaluation survey.

Outcome evaluation

How will youth know they were successful? Did youth achieve their goals? What change did they make happen? How many people benefited? These are all questions that can be answered by carefully evaluating outcomes.

There are many ways of evaluating the outcomes of a project. For example, observation or photographic evidence can be one way of documenting a change. Sometimes it might be necessary to use a survey to understand if people changed their attitude about something. Other times, interviewing people might be the best way for youth to know if they were successful. Whatever the strategy, it should be realistic in terms of length, what it measures, and the time it takes to gather and process the data.

Evaluating outcomes requires planning during the action planning stage. After youth identify what the short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals are, they will need to figure out how to measure those goals.

Use the [Evaluation Methods handout](#) to guide the youth through the process of selecting the best method and developing their evaluation tool.

Sharing results, using evaluation data, and celebrating success

The final vital element of all their hard work is communicating the evidence of their success. In earlier sections many tools have been referenced regarding how to communicate about the project. Additional communication resources are provided on the [YACH Project web page](#). Those same tools may be used to communicate evidence of their success.

Encourage the youth to come back to the Crucial Questions at the beginning and end of this section to make decisions about how best to use the evaluation data they have gathered. Then, celebrate even the small successes, the smallest shifts in the community norms, knowledge, or skills.



Evaluation methods

Learning objectives

- Youth will understand a variety of evaluation methods and their recommended uses.
- Youth will practice matching an appropriate method of evaluation with a situation within an action project.

Materials needed

- Case study cards
- Evaluation method cards

Note: Both sets of cards are available in the [Evaluate Your Plan section](#) of the [YACH Project webpage](#).

Activity instructions

- Choose a case study from the provided case study cards. Read the situation aloud. Then, ask the youth to work in pairs. Give one evaluation method card to each pair of youth and ask them to:
 - Discuss whether the evaluation method on their card might be useful in answering the question, “How do we know if this project has been successful?”
 - Provide the strengths and/or weaknesses of using the evaluation method in the situation given.

Reflection questions

- Based on the discussion, which evaluation method (or combination of methods) do you think would be most appropriate for the situation? Why?
- Based on the strengths and weaknesses shared for each evaluation method, which method do you think might be most useful for your project at the point you are at?





ACTION PLAN ALERT

Use this activity to help youth plan the outcomes they hope to accomplish and how they will evaluate if they have been successful.

They can include their outcomes in the appropriate column of their Action Plan.

Planning for formal evaluation

Learning objectives

- Youth will learn about and understand the planning steps for evaluation.
- Youth will apply what they learned to developing an evaluation plan for their project.
- Youth will learn key concepts of respect for those who take part in an evaluation process.

Materials needed

- [Copies of the evaluation planning handout](#)
- [Evaluation method cards](#)
- Pencils
- Computer(s) and access to the Internet (optional)

Note: Planning handout and evaluation method cards are available in the [Evaluate Your Plan section](#) of the YACH Project webpage.

Activity instructions

Provide each young person with a copy of the evaluation planning handout and ask them to work together as a group. Have one volunteer in each group take notes on the discussion. Give a brief explanation of each step followed by time for the youth to discuss and write a plan. At Step 2, provide copies of the evaluation method cards and encourage the youth to consider the strengths and weaknesses of each method for their question and situation. For Steps 3–5, provide the youth with the web address for the [YACH Project webpage](#) so they can look up additional resources and information for developing their evaluation. During the planning process, be sure to discuss concepts of respect, which are listed on the handout, for those who complete their evaluation.

Reflection questions

- What is your proposed plan for evaluating the project?
- What do you like about the plan you have developed?
- What concerns or questions do you have about any step in this process?

Personal reflection

As a facilitator, there are many ways to facilitate personal reflection. Though many more ways to weave personal reflection into the project process exist, a few alternatives include:

- ▶ Leading a warm-up at the beginning of a meeting or a check-in at the close of a meeting using one or two of the questions listed below;
- ▶ Choosing one to three questions as prompts for a brief journaling activity, either during a meeting or as home practice for the youth;
- ▶ Holding short face-to-face conferences with each youth individually, using a few of these questions to get the youth thinking about what they have learned as well as prompts for you to provide feedback about what you have observed in their work on the project.

No matter how you choose to incorporate personal reflection, it should not take a great deal of time away from the project. Many young people are unaccustomed to self-reflection, so these should be brief experiences that provide bite-size reflective learning practice based on their experiences.

Personal reflection questions

- ▶ How did this project impact me as an individual?
- ▶ What did I learn?
- ▶ What is different because of my individual efforts?
- ▶ How did I contribute to the project?
- ▶ What changed because I contributed to the team?
- ▶ How can I apply what I learned in other areas of my life?
- ▶ What are some of my strengths?
- ▶ What is a skill or behavior that I want to improve in myself?
- ▶ What do I like about working on this project? What do I dislike about working on this project? What does that tell me about future career paths I might consider?
- ▶ Why did I start working on this project?
- ▶ (Later) Why do I choose to keep working on this project?
- ▶ How have I helped others on my team?
- ▶ How have I helped the community?
- ▶ How have I stretched myself or tried something that was outside my comfort zone?
- ▶ How would I like to stretch myself in the future?

Return to the [Adjourning stage](#) of the Stages of Group Development section to find more group reflection activities.

Celebrating

Often skipped in the rush to complete or adjourn a group, celebration is an important tool to be used throughout a project to acknowledge small steps of progress, motivate and energize participants, and of course, keep things fun. Celebrations can be small or large, and they should always be meaningful to the participants. Encourage them to help plan celebrations, within the parameters of available time and resources. Surprise them with mini-celebrations and small appreciations. Never underestimate the power of a quick happy dance or pat on the back when things go well. Return to the [Adjourning stage](#) of the Stages of Group Development to find more celebration ideas.

Evaluation checkpoint

Youth self-assessment

Encourage youth to check-in with themselves before leaving the Evaluate Your Plan stage. Directions to lead a youth self-assessment with peer interviewing are included at the end of the Choose Your Battle section. At this point, they should have implemented all planned actions with accommodations for barriers along the way. After completing the evaluation phase, the youth should have clear and detailed answers to the following questions:

- ▶ What was your impact on the community health issue you selected in the first phase of the project?
- ▶ What data have you gathered through evaluation that demonstrates your impact?
- ▶ Based on the results of your evaluation both during and at the end of the project, what recommendations do you have for future projects or community health efforts?
- ▶ What data have you gathered that supports your recommendations?
- ▶ Who might you share your impact, your recommendations, and the related data with?
- ▶ How could you share it?
- ▶ How might sharing these things with stakeholders increase your project's impact?

If the youth do not have answers to any of these questions, encourage them to dig deeper and apply implementation steps—especially evaluating success or communicating results—that might be missing.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Choose one to three questions that are appropriate for your project from the [personal reflection section of Evaluation](#) and encourage the youth to think back on their experience so far. Reflections may be journaled or discussed either as a group or one-on-one. Keep these reflection times brief and thoughtful.



We the youth

As young people who have gone through an experience of identifying a community need, developing a plan to address it, taking action and evaluating their work, the youth in this team invariably have something of value to share with their community. Encourage the youth to find a way to share their project and outcomes with community leaders at some level. Support the youth in feeling proud of their work, their outcomes, and their impact on the community by encouraging them to step outside their comfort zone and share what they did. Help them figure out how to use their voices in a way that is meaningful to them. They may consider creating a poster or infographic, creating an exhibit of photos from before and after the project, a face-to-face presentation, a radio program or podcast, a video shared through social media, a website, or any of a wide variety of outlets they choose. The point is to inform the public about their work and to use their voices to raise awareness about the issue and/or make recommendations to carry their work forward.



CELEBRATE!

Don't forget to celebrate accomplishments! Ideas are available from the [adjourning section](#) of Pre-planning (page 16) or the [celebration section](#) on the previous page.



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5 Steps of Action

A NONLINEAR PROCESS



The **5 Steps of Action**, as they have been described so far, may seem like a step-by-step process that happens in order from start to finish. In the real world, the different parts of the process work together in a variety of ways. For example:

- Activities in the preplanning, battle-choosing (step 1), and awareness-raising (step 2) sections helps youth form ideas needed to make an action plan (step 3).
- When and if things don't go according to plan during implementation (step 4), groups may need to go back and dig deeper into their battle and awareness raising efforts from step 1 and step 2.
- Finally, evaluation is shown as step 5, but it really happens throughout the project. Evaluation helps groups stay on track and achieve their goals at every step.

The graphic at the right shows how the 5 Steps can be used as a guide, rather than a strict set of rules, to help navigate the ups and down that sometimes happen in a real world project.

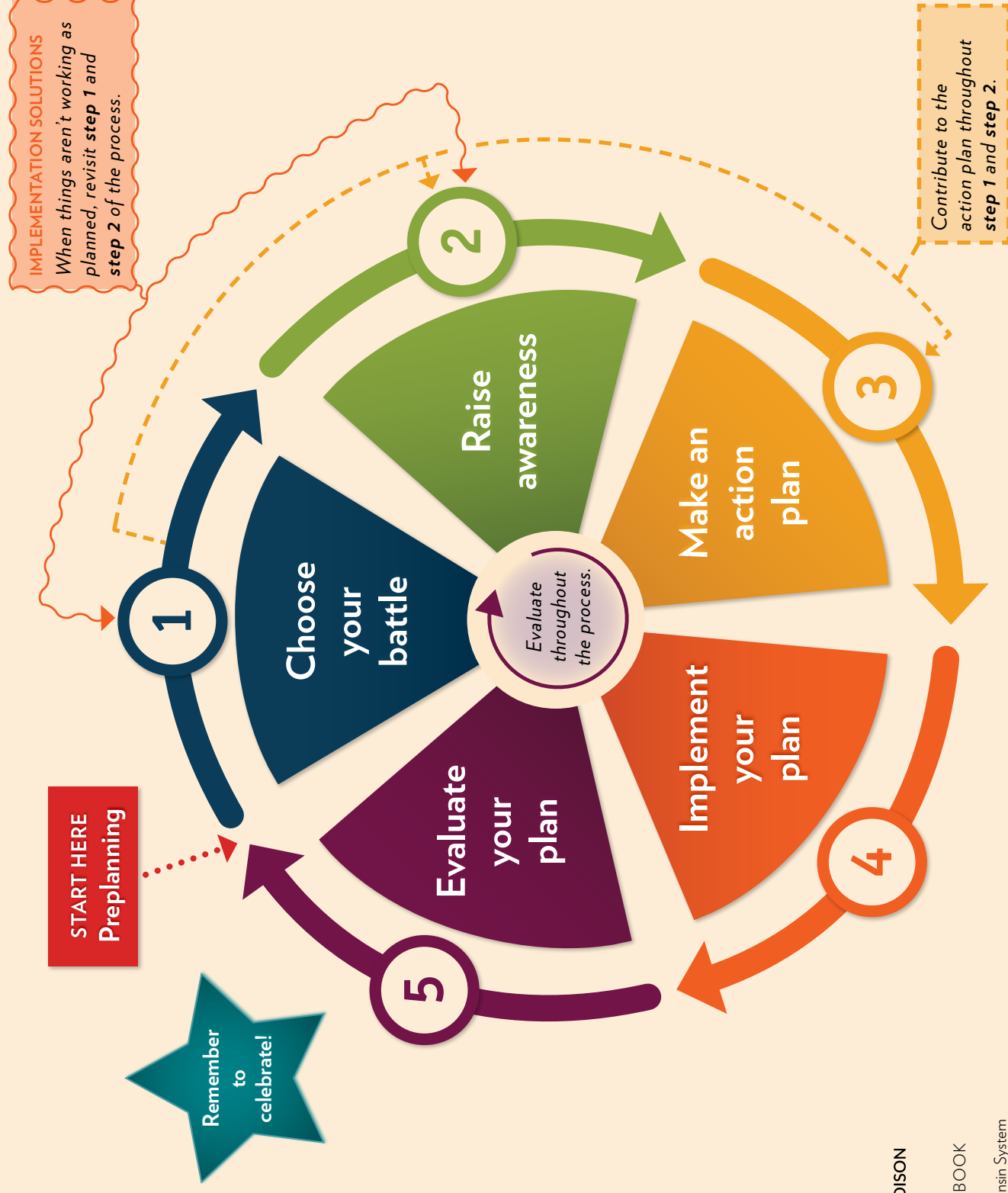


Extension

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Youth Advocates for Community Health GUIDEBOOK
blogs.extension.wisc.edu/yach

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Notes



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