

HOW TO DEFINE YOUR PROJECT

Time: 1 hr. min. **Age:** All

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Choosing and defining the project is a crucial step in PA. When thoughtfully done, taking into consideration the group’s self-interests, how the project is public, and how much time they have together will greatly increase your chances of accomplishing your goals.

WHEN IS THIS USEFUL?

This should be done after the team has clearly identified the problem they are addressing. Of course, many groups form around projects, not issues or problems, but they still need to go back and identify problems. Then go through the process to generate ideas for different projects and then compare them according to the criteria.

ACTIVITIES/STEPS:

Have your group think of all possible projects that address their problem. The group will have already come across a number of different projects through their research and by doing the Issue-Problem-Project exercise, but it is always good to brainstorm more ideas.

Look at what other PA groups or organizations have done, what other organizations are doing? You may need to spend a week researching this. To assist you, we have come up with the following categories for action projects:

| | INFORM / EDUCATE | INFLUENCE / CHANGE | CREATE / BUILD | SERVICE |
|------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Reasons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To raise public awareness of issue To educate a specific population To engage more people in the work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affect legislation Influence public opinion Change school/site or local policy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community pride Available public facilities Make your mark | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help others Address a need |
| Past PA Projects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a brochure Write a book Make a video Hold a public meeting Presentations Perform a play Organize a peace march Distribute magnets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with legislators and lobbyists Change INS policy on the Citizenship test Organized off-leash pet running areas Changed a school mascot Changed attitudes on sexual harassment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the park board to install recycle bins at a park Start a community garden Build a playground Plant trees Paint a mural | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean up a park Work at food shelf |

1. This list should help the group narrow their options. Does your group want to inform, influence, create, or serve? Narrow the options by analyzing which project best addresses the team’s selected problem and can be done in the given time frame. Challenge your

team to think about the desired outcomes of the project and whether it will make a lasting and positive impact on the larger community. Is the project workable and winnable within the allotted time frame? Does the project build on team members' self-interests? Finding a realistic focus is critical in creating a public work project that allows young people to successfully take public action.

2. Select project based on criteria. We have found the way in which projects are defined is absolutely crucial to the success of public problem-solving. The following questions are criteria to assess the "publicness" of your team's work. They should help your team members better understand the public nature of their project and to defend their interest in pursuing the particular project:
 - 1) In what ways does the project address the specified problem? In what ways will it address the root causes of the problem? Does it address any laws or policies regarding the problem?
 - 2) Will the project make a positive lasting impact on the community? Will the project build, create, or make tangible things (including products, institutions, traditions, ways of life, and/or events)? Will these things be:
 - ! Sustainable (i.e. it lasts beyond the life of your team)
 - ! Visible (i.e. the broader community knows about it)
 - ! Accessible (i.e. the general public can take part or use it)
 - ! Memorable (i.e. it becomes part of the collective memory of the community?)
 - 3) Does the project identify and include diverse stakeholders in its work?
 - 4) Is the project realistic (workable and winnable)? Can you carry your work through to a successful conclusion in the time you have?
 - 5) Does the project build on team members' self-interests? Is the team excited about the project?

While few projects will fulfill all of these criteria completely, they can be the basis of comparison between projects. Remember the guiding framework is to make a positive difference in a given time-frame.

A good exercise is to have students (individually or in small groups) work through the criteria for different projects, then they can come and present them to the class/group. The group then needs to make a decision on which project they want to do.

In addition, make sure that your team comes back to these questions as it progresses in its work. Use the criteria to evaluate whether the students are growing in their understanding of the skills and concepts, and to ensure that the work is staying true to its intended outcomes.

After the group has determined its project, it is a good idea to re-map. That is, they go back and meet with important stakeholders to see how they can help you with resources, information, partnership, or direct assistance. Making these connections help make your team's work more political while also creating new relationships with those who may have interests in or power over the problem at hand.