YPRC
YOUTH
PREVENTION
RESOURCE CENTER

ACTION PLANNING GUIDE

"THE FUTURE DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU DO TODAY." MUHAMAD GHANDI

PREVENTION FIRST

YOUTH PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER ACTION PLAN GUIDE

The action plan guide provides youth leadership groups with a user-friendly step-by-step process taking groups through what they must do to succeed! It gives them the tools and directions necessary to work through to a solution. Use this resource to involve others from your school and community in your group's work to reach your goals for the year.

"Plan your work for today and every day, then work your plan."

Margaret Thatcher

ACTION PLANNING DEFINITION

Action planning is a process during which specific and detailed steps are identified and carried through to achieve a goal or objective.

Source: Mind Tools (see References)

Action Planning Benefits

Action plans are helpful because they give a framework for thinking about how to complete a project efficiently. The plan helps to finish activities in a sensible order and ensure critical steps aren't missed.

Action Plans can be beneficial for the following reasons:

- To lead credibility to your project/program and show members of the community the project/program is purposeful and intends to accomplish meaningful goals.
- To ensure details aren't overlooked.
- To identify and plan for opportunities and barriers to success.
- For efficiency: to save time, energy, and resources in the long run.
- For accountability: to increase the chances that people will do what needs to be done.
- For sustainability: to ensure there is a record of the effort so that it may continue or happen again

Source: Community Toolbox (see References)

When to Develop an Action Plan

Develop action plans for each project, program, and strategy with a defined purpose (goal/objective) and require preparation.

How to Use an Action Plan

An action plan is like a road map- it helps get from Point A to Point B, which is the achievement of your goals. Like a map, an action plan is necessary for prevention efforts to get where you need to go.

Develop an action plan after goals are determined for a program, activity and before starting any work. This way, it will give you a map for running your project. However, that doesn't mean you can't develop an action plan mid-stream. If you didn't start with an action plan, you can still develop one that reflects the current and future steps that still need to take place.

Action Planning Team

It's best to complete an action planning with a group of knowledgeable people about the project/program for which you are planning.

Plan Monitoring

Once you begin, monitor the action plan to ensure each activity/action step is occurring as planned. Monitoring your plan is critical to keep your project on track to meet your goals.

Action Planning Steps

Gather the Information

Develop Goals

Identify Action Steps

Identify Task

Establish TimeFrames
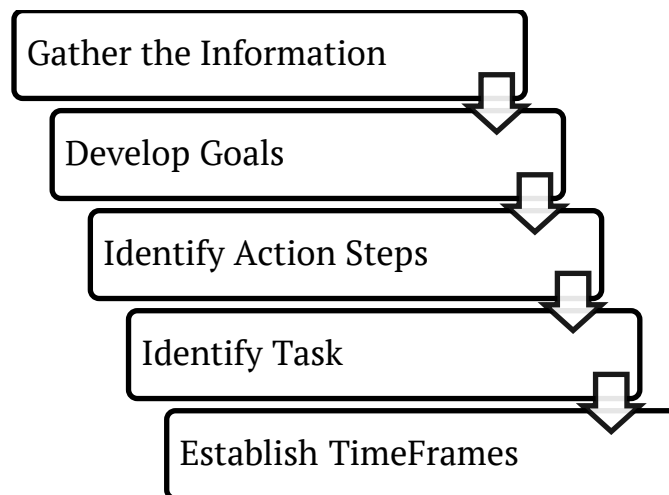
Step One: Gather the Information

Think quantitatively!

Look at data! Partner with a local Community Coalition to help you look at what data says about your school and community. You can also do this on your own. Consider using the most current Illinois Youth Survey report. If your school participated, search specifically for your school by name; if not, the district or county to find information. If you don't know if your school participated, contact your school administration and ask if they did.

Think qualitatively!

When you think about your school and community, what comes to mind? What do you see? How do you feel? Remember – don't just focus on the negative. Think about the positive too! Take a few minutes to reflect on the questions above about your community.
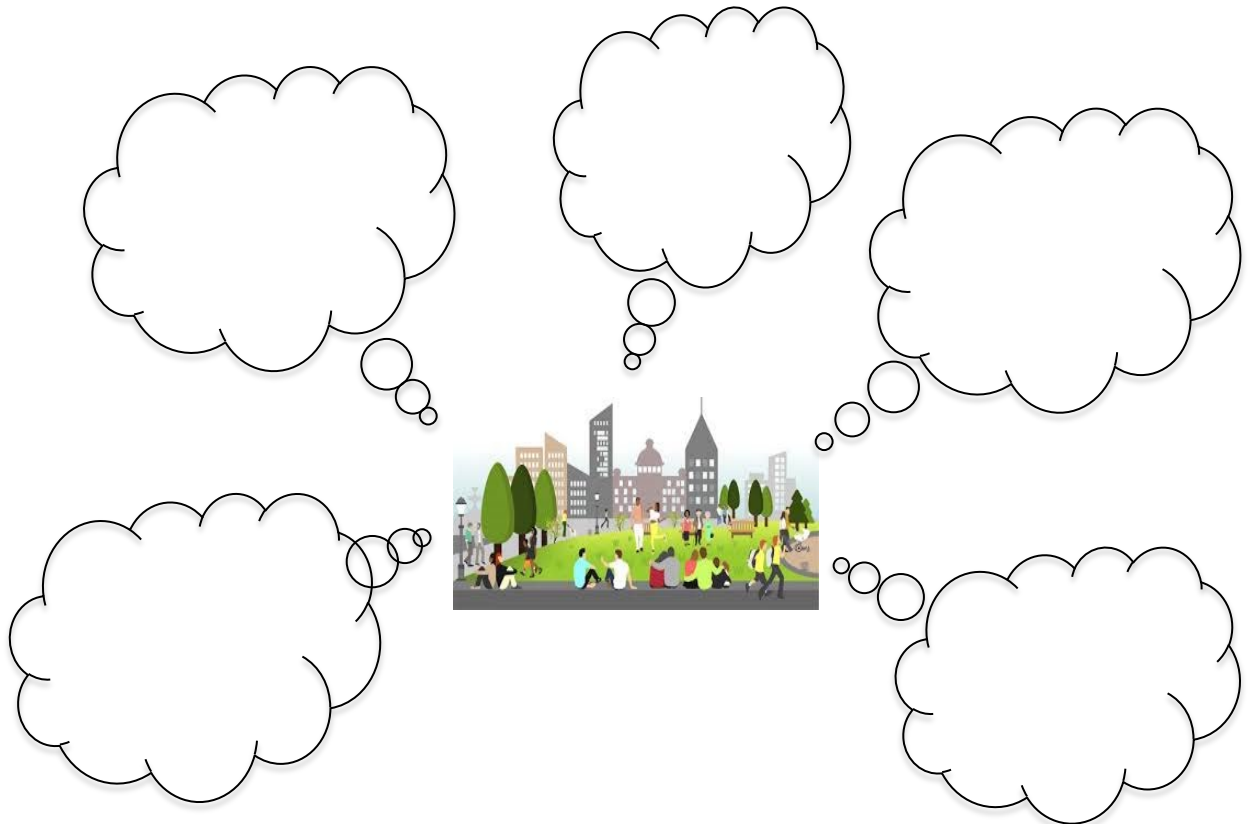
TO DO	As a group, discuss the problems you identified in your community. Also, think about data you may have available to you and about all demographics.
WHY?	The more comprehensive you are in identifying your community's problems, the better prepared you're going to be to create comprehensive solutions.

Tips for Gathering Information

The first step of creating an action plan is to decide what problems you want to address. It is The following tips can assist in information gathering.

Seek In-Depth Information

It will be essential to gather enough information to understand the project, program, or strategy fully. Seek in-depth details about the components that will make strategic planning and implementation successful. Knowing how much information to gather can be difficult. How do you decide that you have enough? Consider what you already know and what pieces of the puzzle are missing.

Be Curious

Critical thinkers are curious about the world. They want to gain knowledge and consistently look for various information sources to fill their gaps in knowledge. Young children are willing to ask hundreds of questions until they get a satisfactory answer. Sometimes, as we get older, we become embarrassed about admitting we don't know something. Frequently ask "why?" and other questions that are relevant to the topic to be sure you understand it.

Listen Carefully

Listen carefully to incorporate what you learn into what you know. Keep asking questions, investigating and clarifying, until you're sure you understand.

Keep an Open Mind

When seeing knowledge, it is essential to be open-minded. Keep your belief systems and assumptions in check and consider all the information gathered. Withhold judgment when the evidence is insufficient, and be willing to adjust your ideas about the topic when the evidence is enough to do so.

Use Credible Sources of Information

Before you evaluate the worth of the information you've gathered, consider your sources. Where did you get the information? Has it been verified? What kinds of authority, training, credentials, or other qualifications does the source of information have? Only use credible sources of information. Examine what information has high value and what is of little importance. Ask yourself, "What information makes sense and what is questionable?

Make Connections

When you get new pieces of information about a topic, incorporate them into what you already know. Figure out the relationships among the data collected and make connections between new ideas and old concepts. See what aspects of the situations changed because of updated information. Consider your situation or context when interpreting data.

Source: College Foundation of West Virginia (see References)

Understand the Information

To completely understand the problems you are addressing, you need to know **why** the problem exists. As a group, take some time to discuss and write down the "why?" Be creative and think outside the box! Remember, there are no wrong answers.

Ask yourself, "Why does this problem exist? Why does it exist in my community? Why does it exist now?"

Some examples may include:
- Cultural Influence
- Lack of Discipline/Law Enforcement
- "Right of Passage" Mindsets
- Peer Pressure (not just youth)
- "Don't Care" Attitude
- Curiosity

Example: Parents don't see the harm in supplying alcohol; therefore, it is socially acceptable.

ISSUES

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.

Why? **TO DO**	Make a list of why you think the problems you've identified are occurring in your school or community. Think about what situations you may or may not have control over. What factors affect only a single issue, and what factors affect multiple issues?
WHY?	If you can successfully identify why problems are occurring, you will be more likely to identify solutions that will get to the root of the problem. Remember, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" (Benjamin Franklin).

Step Two: Develop Goals

Now that you've recognized the issues you are facing, it's time to develop goals. In this step, you should be thinking of the big picture. Don't think of activities yet – only focus on the change you want to see.

Your goals should be SMART!

S - <u>Specific</u>. Be sure your goal is well defined and clear
to anyone who has a basic knowledge of the project.

M - <u>Measurable</u>. Develop some benchmark so
that you've achieved your goal.

A - <u>Attainable</u>. Ensure you can meet the goal.

R - <u>Relevant</u>. Make sure that the goal pertains to that community.

T - <u>Time Limits</u>. Be sure to give yourself just the right
amount of time to achieve the goal – too little or too much time can
negatively affect your goal.

Example Goal: Peer leadership group will distribute information to 60% of parents in ABC Community on the impact underage drinking has on youth within the 2016-2017 school year.

Issue	Goal
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

TO DO	Develop one goal for each of the problematic issues you listed previously.
WHY?	Members need to see where they are and where they want to be. Note that members may not always agree on activities, but most groups find it much easier to decide on a goal. Everyone wants to see change.

Brainstorm Activities to Meet Goal

Now it's time to sit down and focus on your top goals. Get your creative juices flowing!! The number of goals you ultimately focus on depends on your youth leadership group's time and ability. Think about what each goal truly means:

- What problem does it address?
- Think back to why that problem came into existence?
- What can you do to alleviate the issue?

In this step, you are listing activities you want to complete to meet your goal. Think of activities you've done in the past, heard about from other youth leadership groups, or even come up with new, innovative activities of your own.

Goal 1:	
Activities	
1.	
2.	
3.	

Goal 2:	
Activities	
1.	
2.	
3.	

Goal 3:	
Activities	
1.	
2.	
3.	

TO DO	For each goal, identify three activities you plan to administer to accomplish each goal. Be specific.
WHY?	A goal is a mindset. Adding activities transforms goals into plans.

Step Three: Identify Action Steps

Now that you have identified activities, it is time to work on the action steps.

Action steps are the specific efforts established to reach your goals. Action steps are the exact details of your action plan. They should be concrete and explain what will occur. The three phases of any program or activity are:

Planning: It encompasses all the action steps implemented before to ensure success.

Implementation: It entails carrying out the action steps to ensure success.

Post-Implementation: It encompasses all the action steps needed after the implementation to ensure success.

Steps should be simple and written in words that are easily understood. Be concise and identify only one action to complete. Break up any complex steps into multiple steps or tasks. For example: Schedule a meeting with the Community Center Manager to confirm center availability for the Whistle Stop.

Action Steps: Planning
Action Steps: Implementation
Action Steps: Post-Implementation

TO DO	Brainstorm action steps for each phase of the activity.
WHY?	To start thinking of what needs to happen to meet the established goal.

Step Four: Identify Tasks

Now that action steps have been identified, it is time to develop the action plan draft. Involves analyzing and combining the action steps identified. First, analyze each action step and determine whether to:

- Keep it
- Modify it
- Move it to another phase
- Eliminate it or
- Combine it with another step

Identify Tasks

Once you've finalized your action steps, identify all the tasks you need to complete to accomplish each step. Tasks are the sub-steps or pieces of work undertaken to achieve the step. Break significant steps or tasks into smaller, more manageable chunks.

Planning	
	Task
1	
2	
3	
Implementation	
	Task
1	
2	
3	
Planning	
	Task
1	
2	
3	

Assign Tasks

A common misconception is that group leadership or the Adult leader is solely responsible for planning and implementing activities, which is not the case. Delegation is a crucial factor when making an action plan. Ask for volunteers to take on specific tasks and encourage everyone in your group to participate. You are a team, so everyone should do their part.

In this step, you should make a list of individuals who will accomplish specific tasks—allowing activities to be more of a team effort and enable more members to be directly involved in the planning and implementation processes.

Planning		
	Tasks	Person Responsible
1		
2		
3		

Implementation		
	Tasks	Person Responsible
1		
2		
3		

Post-Implementation		
	Tasks	Person Responsible
1		
2		
3		

TO DO	Make a list of who will accomplish each task.
WHY?	To maintain responsibility, the leadership group should be transparent in roles/duties and manage each task.

Step Five: Establish Time Limits

Hang in there! We're almost there! You are now working with a lot of information!

In any work, life can get quite hectic, so you should develop a timetable of events. Decide when you want to have each event – date and time. It is essential to work in a setting where dates may fill up quickly with sporting events, productions, etc.

Try to hold your event during a time when the most people will be involved. During this step, you may wish to consult a school or community calendar of events. According to your activity, you may want to stay away from other events or partner with the other event.

Task	Description	Start Date	End Date
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

TO DO	Decide when you want to accomplish your activities. Allow ample time for planning, yet hold the event while it's still fresh and exciting among members.
WHY?	A timetable will ensure all members are on the same page. Members are often involved in many programs, activities, etc. Therefore, to provide the most significant support, the majority's dates/times should be agreed upon by the group.

Expect and Plan for Roadblocks

As well thought out your plan may be, roadblocks often exist. Youth groups often create such rigid goals that any alteration destroys the event's effectiveness or activity. Though it's impossible to know what roadblocks you may face, youth groups should take time to plan for roadblocks and be cognitive as to how the group will handle such situations.

Here are some examples of roadblocks:

- Difficulty finding dates

- Doing something that goes against community norm

- Lack of support from the school, teachers, or administration

Potential Roadblocks	Possible Solutions

TO DO	Identify potential roadblocks you may face and brainstorms ways to deal with each situation.
WHY?	Roadblocks are typical, so it's best to expect them.

Develop a Draft

You have successfully worked through each component of an action plan. Now is the time to develop a complete draft, combining all the information you've documented. Let's review the details.

The following page is an action plan template. Take each step identified above and develop your draft. The activities above allowed you to begin the process; the template allows for expansion on the above work you've done.

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Action Planning Document Example

Strategy	*Underage Drinking Townhall*			
Goal/Objective	1. *Raise awareness about underage drinking in their community, and* 2. *Recruit stakeholders to work with to address the problem.*			

Step	Tasks	Person Responsible	Start Date	End Date
Invite Key Stakeholders/ VIPs	*Identify key stakeholders*	*Team*	*Feb 1*	*Feb 28*
	Develop a contact list of identified stakeholders	*Josie*	*Feb 1*	*Feb 28*
	Develop an invitation letter	*Josie*	*Feb 1*	*Feb 28*
	Send invitation letter to stakeholders	*Josie*	*March 12*	
	Make follow-up calls to stakeholders	*Breanne*	*March 19*	*March 26*
Develop Registration Process	*Develop a registration list in Excel*	*Chance*	*Feb 14*	*Feb 28*
	Send reminder emails to registrants	*Chance*	*April 23*	
Market Event	*Write a press release for the event.*	*Breanne*	*April 23*	
	Send the press release to the established Media List	*Chance*	*April 25*	*April 30*

Action Planning Template

Strategy	
Goal/Objective	

Planning				
Step	**Tasks**	**Person Responsible**	**Start Date**	**End Date**

Implementation				
Step	**Tasks**	**Person Responsible**	**Start Date**	**End Date**

Post-Implementation

Step	Tasks	Person Responsible	Start Date	End Date

Design Specific Ways to Measure Your Impact

This step is often the most difficult for leadership groups, but it is crucial for understanding the difference you make in your community.

In this step, you are identifying and/or designing evaluation tools to measure how effective you are in your endeavors. You should have one evaluation tool for each of your goals.

Throughout the process, you document each step with pictures. Use the placard the following hashtag on all your social media posts: #IL_YPRC —this will be an easy way to record all your efforts.

Some examples may include:

- Surveys-- questionnaires administered and results compiled
- Observations- actual recorded behaviors
- Focus Groups - groups of students given questions and notes taken
- Interviews - one-on-one conversations
- Evaluation Report - a compilation of information gathered through all of your evaluation tools

Be sure to include your photos to document what you did!

Tip! Use your local coalition to help design evaluation tools with your input.

TO DO	Decide which evaluation tool or tools you plan to use for each goal.
WHY?	If you forget to evaluate, you won't know the impact you made. Keep in mind that the change you encounter may not be solely due to your work. Multiple groups in your school and community may be addressing the same issue.

Summary

Once you have completed the steps to developing an action plan, you are ready to implement your program/activity and accomplish your goals!

Remember each leadership group is different; they vary in their leadership capacities, time and money capabilities, demographic composition, etc. Use this guide as a resource – a guide to further your endeavors with better management and organization.

Congratulations! You've just created an action plan you can use to make a difference in your school and community. Remember, stick to your plan and monitor to make any changes if needed. Contact the YPRC office for support or assistance.

A picture is worth 1000 words! Don't forget to document your activities with photos.
We want to follow your progress and track and share your successes. Let us know, so we can highlight your work on our social media platforms and possibly in our monthly newsletter!

REMEMBER

If you always do what you always did,
you're always going to get what you always got!

Be creative. Stand firm. Never settle.

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