

# Steps to Creating Change

In order to make change that is lasting and significant you must work together and think about avenues that ensure your efforts have the most “bang for their buck”. The following are a few ideas for how to walk your group through this process...



## ★ Pick a **topic** to work on.

- If you're not sure what area to focus on and you have time, you may want to start by doing a needs assessment. This can look like sending a survey out to other youth to find out what issues they feel are most important in your school or community, holding forums/focus groups, or doing a targeted analysis with a small group, like a certain class or club.
- If you have already picked a topic, you can still find out what others think about it. Asking others about the topic your group cares about not only helps inform you on all sides/components of the issue but also can help you to figure out others who might support you. Knowing what others think about the topic and if you have the support of others in your school or community is an important early step. Power in numbers.

## ★ Look into the possible **root causes** of this issue in your community.

- Your group might want to work on reducing underage drinking in your town. Ask your group “Why does underage drinking happen?” Then take it even deeper by talking about what causes the causes. Keep asking “why” until you get to some “roots” of the problem. Be sure to talk about the difference between the symptoms of a problem, and the causes of the problem.
- After talking about the root causes, check in with your group to see how to focus a project so the plan addresses a source of the issue, and isn't just keeping the branches of the problem trimmed while the roots still grow.

## ★ Brainstorm ways to create **lasting change** on the issue.

- Often we are drawn to the quick fix, but remember to balance your group's need to take action now with the pursuit of sustainable solutions that may take more time. Focusing on a root cause is a good start towards having a deeper impact, but also think about how your project(s) will result in change that lasts.
- Is there a way to incorporate your project into another model, such as service learning? Connecting school-based groups with broader community issues and policy can increase opportunities for skill development and give youth an opportunity to be part of finding solutions to community challenges.

- Use this as an opportunity for your group to talk together about policy and environmental change. Your group may want or need to create or change policies (school, local or state!) to be successful in creating lasting change, and understanding the role of policy in long-term change is a great tool for youth to have. There are many great resources out there on youth involvement in policy change—check out MYAN.org to get started.
- Make sure you talk about how you will know when the change has been accomplished—set a measurable goal, and figure out ways that you’ll measure progress towards the end result.

★ **Create an action plan for how you will create sustainable change.**

- What are the steps you need to take?
- When will you take them?
- Who will do each of the steps?
- How will your group members stay connected to each other?
- How often will you meet to update each other on progress?

★ **Seek out allies and supporters.**

- Who are the people in the school and community who can help to spread the word and support your efforts?
- Has another group or organization tried to address this problem before? Be sure to learn from their successes & challenges. Learning from history and getting community buy-in are both ways to make your project’s impact greater, deeper and more lasting.
- Welcome people to your cause, and thank them for their contributions. People will want to join you if they feel like they are part of something bigger.

★ **Reflect and celebrate.**

- It’s important to take time throughout the process to stop & assess how things are going so you can make adjustments to address things that aren’t going as planned or expected. Gather input from everyone involved about what’s going well, and what could be improved.
- Creating change is often a long process. Celebrate the steps along the way, not just the final result. Recognize the importance of small changes along your path to keep everyone motivated.
- Remember to report out about your successes along your path to change—tell your funders, boards, community, the media, etc. Telling your story along the way gathers more and more people to your cause as you go.

