

# YOUTH ON BOARD



## Steps to Organize and Advocate for Change

1. Understand the fundamentals
2. Pick your issue
3. Brainstorm goals
4. Who's got the power?
5. Choose a strategy
6. Make an action plan

*No attacks*

*Giving appreciation*

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## Step 1: Understanding the Fundamentals

Relationships→Personal Change→Institutional Change

*To make big changes in the world, we need to keep in mind that the most effective long lasting changes in the world come from expanding people's minds. The quickest way to do this is by developing relationships where people grow and learn in a productive manner. Policies can be reversed, minds can't!*

### **Fundamentals of Advocacy and Organizing**

- 1. Take risks.** Change does not come with comfort. In order to make changes, we have to do things and talk to people we're scared of. We have to stand up for what we believe in, even if it isn't easy. We have to risk people disagreeing with us, or risk rejection.
- 2. Dream big.** It's important to hold onto big dreams and ideas. As young people, we sometimes get this scared out of us. Having a big vision is essential to success.
- 3. Start with something winnable.** In the beginning, focus on small, short-term, attainable goals. Work on an issue that will have an immediate impact on people's lives.
- 4. Empower people.** Mobilizing the power that people already have is as important as working to change the power structure. Get lots of people involved in your movement. Give them the opportunity to build their leadership skills.
- 5. Change the system.** Make a lasting effect on the power structure with your actions. Change legislation or policy, get new people elected, build a permanent coalition with a powerful presence, alter the way everyone looks at the issue forever.
- 6. Be passionate.** There are plenty of issues out there that people feel passionately about. Use those strong feelings to feed your movement's momentum.
- 7. It only takes one person to light a fire.** It only takes one person to decide to change things, even if you can't change them all by yourself.
- 8. Build a team.** Don't do this on your own. You always have friends, allies, and others (both young and old) who are ready to join and support you. Be there for them and they'll be there for you.
- 9. Build adult allies.** Sometimes it may be tempting to keep adults out of the picture altogether, or to oppose yourself to everything about their system. In the long run, though, it's better to work with the system, to get it on your side.

## Step 2: Pick Your Issue

### Sample Issues

Below are some examples of issues you can organize a crew around with the aim of increasing youth voice in the community. You can also make up your own issue.

- Plans to build a teen community center were cancelled for lack of funding.
- The school board does not have a student advisory committee or any other way for young people to have a say in policy.
- A popular magazine aimed at young women puts too much emphasis on fashion, beauty, and dating, without addressing the negative effects of making women into sex objects.
- The high school does not have a strong policy addressing sexual harassment of students by teachers.
- Black men are turned down for jobs at the local ice cream parlor.
- Walmart wants to build a store on the site of a park that happens to be a favorite neighborhood hangout of young people.
- Young people are harassed or treated unfairly by local police force.
- The public library closes at 6:00 PM. Many young people work right after school and need to do their homework in the evening.
- The cable access station won't put programs produced by young people on the air unless an adult censor checks them first.
- Your state has a parental notification law in effect for young women seeking reproductive health services.
- The school day starts at 7:00 AM sharp, and students are penalized for coming late. However, many of them have to commute over an hour and also have nighttime jobs.
- Mandatory testing is taking up too much time in the school year and not helping anyone learn.

### Fill in with your own:

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Developed from *Youth! The 26% Solution* by Wendy Schgaetzel Lesko & Emanuel Tsouronis, II (Activism 2000 Project, 1998)

**Checklist for Picking an Issue—A good issue should:**

- **Result in a noticeable improvement in people’s lives.** An improvement that can be seen and felt is tangible evidence of victory for your crew.
- **Be winnable.** The issue shouldn’t be so large or long term that it overwhelms you. Pick something where you see a good chance of succeeding.
- **Be something people care deeply about.** People should not only agree with your goals, but also feel strongly about them. They need to be willing to fight for it.
- **Be clear.** Pick a problem that people can already see for themselves, not something that you have to convince them exists. Also, have a clear target: the person or agency that can give you what you want.
- **Have a clear time frame.** Your action plan should have a beginning, a middle and an end. Also, consider how your efforts will fit into the calendar: is it a time when few people are around (i.e. the winter holidays)? Is it just before an election?
- **Be non-divisive.** Avoid issues that cause divisions among the people you’re trying to work with or help. For example, don’t push for funding for one student group if it means funds will be cut off for another.
- **Build leadership.** Involve as many people as possible in leadership roles, or make sure there are a variety of ways for people to take part in the movement.
- **Be consistent with your values and visions.** You’ll spend a lot of time and energy working on this issue. Make sure it reflects your own vision for an improved world.

**So...What’s Your Issue?**

Pick your top three issues and write them below. Then, using the chart on the next page, see how well they fit the criteria for a good issue.

**Issue #1**

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**Issue #2**

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**Issue #3**

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Issue #1	Issue #2	Issue #3	Will the Issue:
			1. Result in a noticeable improvement
			2. Be winnable
			3. Be something people care deeply about
			4. Be clear
			5. Have a clear time frame
			6. Be non-divisive
			7. Build leadership
			8. Be consistent with your values and vision

After you see how the top three issues compare, narrow your choice down to one. Write that issue at the top of the “Step 3: Brainstorm Goals” page.

Developed from *Organizing for Social Change* by Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, & Steve Max (Seven Locks Press, 1991), pp. 16-18.

## Step 3: Brainstorm Goals

Your Issue

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### **3 Kinds of Goals:**

- **Short-term goals** usually involve building up a support base or raising awareness of the issue. It is also important for your team to have some small victories along the way to achieving a larger objective. For example, if the issue is police harassment, a short-term goal might be to get an adult group, such as PTA, to write letters in support of making the police department more respectful of young people.
- **Intermediate goals** will be to make a specific impact or change with your actions. An example: organizing a rally where young people speak out about their negative experiences with police and present a list of grievances to the police commissioner.
- **Long-term goals** aim toward a permanent change in policy or address the issue on a large scale. Creating a permanent student council or liaison with the police department to help monitor relations is an example of a long-term goal for this issue.

Developed from *Organizing for Social Change* by Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, & Steve Max (Seven Locks Press, 1991), pp. 16-18.

Now it's time to brainstorm goals for this issue. Before you start, look at the handout *Tips for Brainstorming*. When you're finished, read ideas aloud with your group.

### ***Let the Brainstorm Begin!***

In the space below, brainstorm your goals for addressing this issue. Try to come up with some examples of all three kinds of goals. (Use the back of this page if you need more room.)

## Step 4: Who's Got the Power?

### ***Power Trip***

Once you have outlined your goals, the next question you must answer is: Who has the power to give you what you want? And what power do you have to influence them?

### ***Brainstorm answers to the following questions:***

**1. Who has the power to give you what you want?** There might be several levels to this answer. For example, you might first approach the principal of your school with a proposal to add a class on Black History to the curriculum. If the principal won't hear you, you can approach the next level up, the superintendent of schools. If the superintendent says no, you can go to the Board of Education. Try to think of three different levels of power you can target:

**Level 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Level 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Level 3:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. What power do you have to influence them?** Do they need your votes in order to say in power? Your school? Your business? Write your ideas below.

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**3. Who can help you attain your goals?** What people or groups have power or resources (like money, supplies, office space) that can help you?

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## Step 5: Choose Your Strategy

### ***What are you going to do?***

Now you must choose the specific actions you will take to accomplish your goal.

These should:

- Focus on your targets (those who have the power to give you what you want).
- Make a specific demand.
- Take your target by surprise (be something that they don't expect, have never encountered before, or aren't used to).
- Be something your group is comfortable doing.

Developed from *Organizing for Social Change* by Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, & Steve Max (Seven Locks Press, 1991), p. 35.

### ***Some examples of strategies:***

- Testify at a public hearing
- Write letters
- Write a wish list or list of demands
- Draft and circulate a petition
- Meet with decision makers
- Hold a protest, rally, or walkout
- Win a seat on a government or agency board
- Conduct a student summit
- Create a speakers' bureau that teaches other young people about a certain issue

Below, brainstorm some strategies for achieving your goal:



## Step 6: Make an Action Plan

### ***Put it All Together***

An action plan is a detailed outline of all the steps you need to take to achieve your goal. Once you put a plan together, you can actually act it out with your group. For instance, if your issue is sexual harassment of students by teachers and your chosen strategy is to stage a walkout during school hours, your action plan might be:

1. Call a meeting and hand out flyers asking the student body to attend.
2. At the meeting, educate students on their rights, and on what's going on. Discuss concerns and address questions.
3. Pick a date and time for the walkout and get the word out to everyone who wants to participate.
4. Do the walkout.

Below, brainstorm all the steps you can think of for your action plan.

Now, choose the 5 most important things to do. Write them below, in the order you need to do them.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Try to act out these steps with your group. Figure out which roles each person will play, and go through the steps in order

## **No Attacks**

**An attack is an organized attempt to disrupt the functioning of an organization or to damage the reputation of people within that organization.**

1. Attacks on any leader in your organization are not a useful way to organize. Attacking someone for their leadership usually says more about the person doing the attacking than the about the person being attacked.
2. It's your job to interrupt attacks. It's important to think about what is scary about asserting ourselves to interrupt an attack.
3. Gossiping (talking behind someone's back) is a form of attacking someone. Deal directly with the conflict and do not criticize leaders to other people in the organization.
4. Stop attacks quickly. If possible, ensure that apologies are made to all those involved.

## **Tips for Giving Appreciations**

### **1. Don't put yourself down.**

For example, try not to say things like, "You're such a great runner. I can't run well, but you're great."

### **2. When someone appreciates you, don't disagree with her.**

Just accept it!

### **3. Say your appreciation directly to the person who is being appreciated.**

"Jane, I want to appreciate you for..." It may feel more embarrassing, but it's more effective.

### **4. Laugh as much as you want!**

It helps with the awkwardness most of us feel about giving and receiving appreciations.

### **5. Be as specific as possible.**

Use examples, instead of just saying, "You're nice."

### **6. Stay away from compliments about a person's appearance.**

Those appreciations aren't as meaningful.

### **7. You don't have to know someone really well in order to appreciate her (or him).**

Just tell her something you've noticed about her in the time that you've known her.

## **About Youth on Board**

Youth on Board prepares youth to be leaders and decision makers in their communities and strengthens relationships between youth and adults through publications, customized workshops, and technical assistance. We envision a world where young people are fully respected, and treated as valued and active members of their families, communities, and society. To reach that end, we work to:

- Change attitudes and strengthen relationships among youth, and between young people and adults.
- Prepare young people to be leaders and decision makers in all aspects of their lives.
- Ensure that policies, practices, and laws reflect young people's role as full and valued members of their communities.

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