The Freechild Project
Youth Action Guide

By Adam Fletcher
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The Freechild Project promotes new roles for young people throughout society.

The mission of The Freechild Project is to advocate, inform, and celebrate social change led by and with young people around the world, especially those who have been historically denied the right to participate. We do this through programs, facilitating training and workshops, and through our website. We provide training, technical assistance and tools to community groups, nonprofit orgs, schools, and government agencies focused on the most diverse meaning of youth engagement.

The Freechild Project…

- Operates programs in a number of communities;
- Provides technical assistance;
- Facilitates training and speaking, and;
- Manages a massive online database at www.freechild.org.

Today, The Freechild Project operates as a community outreach effort of CommonAction Consulting, a socially-minded boutique consulting firm in Olympia, Washington. Writing about Freechild, the School Library Journal wrote, "By far the largest repository of projects, ideas, and organizational links, [Freechild] provides more than adequate information to help students brainstorm ideas in order to start their own initiatives."

You can reach Freechild for your needs right now.

The Freechild Project
Phone: (360) 489-9680
Email: info@freechild.org
Website: www.freechild.org
What are the goals of Youth Action?
Youth Action has three primary goals:

- **Change Your Community**—Youth Action is about young people making a difference in the lives of others and having an impact beyond themselves.
- **Changing Youth**—Nothing happens in a vacuum, and Youth Action changes youth activists, too!
- **Changing the Future**—Youth Action is a grand declaration that the future isn’t done! Youth can dream of the world they want to live, and then co-create that world for all of us.

Who participates in Youth Action?
Youth Action is for **everyone**! Every year, millions of children, youth, parents, and families in thousands of communities around the world participate in Youth Action.
The Freechild Project is a key supporter.

What happens during Youth Action?
Youth Action is any impact everyday youth have on communities around the world. Any time of year, young people are working in partnership with adults—in families, schools, businesses, community organizations, government programs, and faith-based groups—to lead activities that transform their communities. They’re also taking action on their own. Projects range from education to health care and supporting homeless families. Millions of youth are introduced to Youth Action every day, becoming inspired to continue a lifetime of engagement that changes the places we live in, learn at, and share all the time. Youth Action is about doing, and right now young activists are launching powerful new programs, leading important social change, creating massive policy changes, and developing sustainable Youth Action programs to create a culture of engaged communities.

**How should we use this toolkit?**

*The Freechild Project Youth Action Tool Kit* is a guide to creating effective projects for Youth Action. Use it as a complete package, or refer to specific Youth Actions that apply to your needs. The exercises, checklists, and questions throughout this toolkit can provide guidance and framework while you brainstorm and keep track of the progress of Youth Action.

**What other resources are available?**

The Freechild Project offers young people and adult allies a lot of information about Youth Action. Our website at www.freechild.org offers lists of Action and Issues young people are taking and addressing through Youth Action. There are also several free publications, how-to guides, and more.

See the last section of this guide for a complete list of resources from The Freechild Project and other organizations that promote Youth Action.
The Freechild Project is in a unique effort to engage the young people throughout society. As one of the largest youth action organizations in the world, Freechild works tirelessly to provide the best tools, training, and technical assistance to young people who are changing the world.

In the past, many organizations have been committed to supporting Youth Action throughout communities and schools. In this sense *Youth Action* has been seen as the engagement of young people in changing the world. However, The Freechild Project supports Youth Action for a different reason. *Action* happens when young people are seen as work to benefit the community *instead* of themselves. Young people receive some benefits by learning more about how their actions make a difference in the world, but that’s not the sole focus.
This is an extraordinary moment in time. Around the world, young people have unique opportunities to come together and solve our most troubling challenges. Young people from all communities are contributing their time, talents and resources, and more want to be asked to. The Freechild Project is calling on everyone—children, youth, and adults—to take action through Youth Action. Freechild is an excited partner in Youth Action, and calls on young people around the world to take action. We support young people, their parents, teachers, and around the world as YOU create social change through Youth Action.

We have published a brief introduction to Youth Action called *The Freechild Project Guide to Social Change Led By and With Young People*, and in it you can find more than 30 descriptions of issues young people are addressing through Youth Action. They include education, adultism, the environment, and sustainable agriculture. You can download it free at www.commonaction.org/SocialChangeGuide.pdf. The same guide includes a list of more than 30 distinct actions young people are taking to address these issues.
Youth Action is a launching pad for long-term projects that are effective and sustainable. Planning your own projects, tracking community impact and developing creative partnerships can encourage young people to think strategically about Youth Action. One way to do this is by collaborating on projects that benefit communities and that bring valuable resources to its every community member.

**Taking ACTION Further**

Youth Action takes traditional volunteerism and youth service further by putting young people on a path to social change. Every young person needs to step up and become an action leader in their community by identifying unmet needs in their communities, developing their own Youth Action projects, and recruiting new young people who are interested in the same issues. Also, young people are encouraged to develop creative partnerships with a broad and diverse group of stakeholders, including nonprofits, faith-based groups, issue groups, labor unions, educational institutions, businesses, corporations, foundations, and all levels of government.

The ways that society teaches young people, volunteerism and youth service often stop at the doors of the nonprofit when youth are leave a program. Youth Action is designed to encourage young people to stay involved and invested over time by building effective relationships with each other and adult allies through meaningful, outcome-oriented activities. As The Freechild Project has shown the world for more than a decade, sustained, collaborative and focused Youth Action can create lasting community change. Let’s get take young people further and celebrate Youth Action together for the future of the world!
A CALL TO ACTION

Young people are becoming more involved in changing the world than ever before. Youth Action taps into that amazing commitment, energy and creativity and encourages young people to stay engaged in order to address some of the most pressing issues facing our world.

Youth Action can provide a strategic way for young people to research meaningful, sustainable and effective long-term goals in communities around the world. Instead of just performing one-day volunteer activities, Youth Action allows young people to collaborate with adults on and commit to solving some of the most important and challenging issues today. All young people are encouraged to participate in planning, research, action, relationship-building, leadership and reflection throughout their communities. The Freechild Project’s outcome of this publication will show three main trends emerge:

1. **Social change led by young people is not all about young people.** Instead, children and youth are working for their communities, their families, their cities, and their world. Action that is focused on youth issues often addresses young people as a whole, not isolating other youth because of race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.

2. **More action has led to more sophistication, creating more sustainable outcomes.** Youth-led social change is not new; the tools and strategies being developed stand on the shoulders of giants from more than a century ago. However, the increasing sophistication and intentionality have
heightened the effectiveness of youths’ approaches and deepened the impacts they are having throughout communities.

3. *A broad youth movement exists today.* Media is not talking about it, researchers are generally not aware of it, and even young people do not know they belong to it. However, this decentralization in social movements today is part of a trend called “The Multitudes,” in which localized action without focal-point leaders is subtly, powerfully changing the world.

**How To Do it Right**

**Make Youth Action Into Your Mission:** Make Youth Action the mission while setting the goals of whatever activities you do—whether in school, nonprofits, or around your community. Young people will make communities more successful for *everyone*.

**Promote Youth Voice:** Engaging the vision, ideas, actions and knowledge of children and youth is essential to Youth Action. Selecting, designing, implementation, and evaluation of activities throughout Youth Action provides an wide number of possible ways to engage youth voice.

**Infuse Diversity Into Your Action:** Fostering broad perspectives and action from across communities through Youth Action will build, sustain and encourage the effectiveness of young people in communities around the world.

**Develop Lasting Partnerships That Go Beyond Being Young:** Leveraging everyone’s assets no matter their age and promoting collaborative communication and interaction among stakeholders can promote the effectiveness of Youth Action.
Increase Young People’s Capacity for Meaningful Action: Addressing real-world problems through teambuilding, critical thinking and strategic planning will ensure feelings of commitment and connectivity throughout Youth Action.

Build Long-Term Support and Go For the Distance: Ensuring Youth Action is long and intense through deliberate planning, ongoing reflection and through project evaluation will support sustainability.

Integrate Adults as Allies: Youth Action provides an opportunity for all community members to become partners. The best action is inspired and led by young people and adults in equitable relationships from day one.

Make Room for Reflection: Facilitating continuous reflection before, during, and after Youth Action will encourage critical and creative thinking, ensuring responsiveness and adaptation for success.

**YOUTH ACTION IDEAS**

There are so many ways youth can take action to change their community!

- Create a legal graffiti wall
- Attend meetings for adults and sharing youth voice
- Collect and distribute books
- Advocate free public transportation for all people under 18
- Register community members for library cards
- Make and produce instead of consuming and collecting
• Challenge politicians to engage youth in active ways
• Reject materialism
• Promote youth voice in police/neighborhood relations
• Read to children
• Lead a research project on economic activity among youth
• Organize back-to-school school reform activism
• Plant community gardens
• Reach out to elders and ancestors and listening to stories they tell
• Make active decisions on behalf of yourself, your family, and your community
• Spend your money in places that don’t discriminate against youth
• Make a facebook page or twitter account for an issue that matters to you
• Work with senior centers and nursing homes to promote intergenerational partnerships
• Address issues that young people care about
• Face “heavy” issues or things adults don’t expect you to care about in public places
• Confront adultism
• Be a friend to adults who care
• Have a real conversation with adults in your life
• Propose a youth/adult co-leadership program in your community
• Rally other youth to make change in your community
• Have a mixer for youth and adults who want to change your community
• Meet with community leaders
• Write letters of thanks supporting meetings that allow youth to fully participate
• Ask adults for help when needed
• Recognize adult involvement when they support youth
• Hold adults accountable for activities that negatively affect youth
• Treat adults as individuals
• Be the change you wish to see in the world
• Watch movies, documentaries, and other learning or motivating video
• Teach adults to care by holding training
• Start a resource library
• Teach other youth about changing the world and taking action
• Create a list of all opportunities for youth involvement in your community
• Conduct a teach-in about community change and Youth Action for youth and adults
• Host a town meeting for everyone, including parents and other community members
• Introduce people who need resources to places where they’re available
• Support political candidates representing youth issues as full issues in their campaigns
• Raise funds for a youth-led organization working in your community
• Support youth-led organizations in your community
• Partner with community advocacy organizations to address important issues
• Create and facilitate a youth-driven coalition for community change
Early and deliberate planning is the best way to ensure successful Youth Action. Your initial planning should include the following:

1. Get Ready
2. Take Action
3. Reflect and evaluate
4. Celebrate
5. Plan
STEP ONE: GET READY

Preparation actively engages youth in identifying what projects they would like to do during Youth Action, and should take two or three weeks. Either as a whole unit or as a special committee, they should talk about issues that are important to them and choose a local challenge they want to address. This step will allow them to build on skills that exist among them and learn new ones. During preparation youth can discuss and break down preconceived assumptions about Youth Action, community issues and other concerns. They can also learn to work in teams, gain relationship skills, think strategically, research, and plan a detailed and intentionally designed project. Preparation is where youth roles as change-makers can start being shaped.

GET READY: Establish the need

Figuring out why you want to do a project is important for helping others understand what your project is and why it’s important. Start by brainstorming possibilities, and then make an outline for why the project is important. Think about what research needs to happen and who needs to be connected, and decide what change can happen throughout Youth Action and beyond. Instead of assuming everyone knows a lot about a topic, actively engaging all youth in research will help youth understand the situation, its history, and the role it plays right now in your community. If your issue is joblessness within your school’s neighborhood, study everything from the area’s demographics to its economic infrastructure. Whatever youth deem most important, make sure that information proves there is a strong community need. That gives you research findings to share with public officials and others who might support or donate to your project.

GET READY: Create Objectives
After youth have decided on a Youth Action project write down and define your goals. For example, a project that focuses on studying children’s insurance coverage your community could have many directions. Do youth want to provide a voice for other youth in your community? Do they want to see more children with insurance coverage?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you want to work with other youth or adults?
- Do you want to change your community?
- Do you know that you can succeed at changing your community?
- Do you want to see other youth become concerned community members?
- Do you want youth to realize their potential to change the world?
- Do you want to build relationships and communication skills?
- Do you want nontraditional youth leaders to positively change your community?
- Do you want to create youth/adult partnerships?
- Do you want youth to better understand your community?
- Do you want youth to care about multicultural issues?

**GET READY: Identify Resources**

It is important to have a handful of partners that will support your Youth Action project. Neighboring nonprofit organizations, religious institutions, local businesses and government agencies can provide food, make contacts, donations, assist in project planning or volunteer. Ask youth to decide who they want onboard, and let them write letters or make phone calls inviting these people to assist in the project.

Provide the sponsors with an incentive to help. For example, you can use the The Freechild Project name and logo on all of your handouts and tools or provide individual recognition to young people. By giving back to these various groups, you
are likely to build a shared relationship and strong web of support. This is also a time when youth can recruit other youth to Youth Action. Begin with the approach detailed in this kit, and then go to young people you don’t know as well as organizations in your neighborhood that may have potential youth activists, such as churches, nonprofit organizations, and sports teams.

Additionally, consider taking advantage of local grants. These types of financial supports are useful because they can help youth think all the way through a project. Whether it’s planning, including diverse participants or engaging public officials, The Freechild Project offers support in all these areas.

**GET READY: Recruit New Youth and Establish New Partnerships**

Sometimes the most difficult part of community planning is organizing who else should be involved. Often we rely on people and organizations we already know. That is a good starting point, but your Youth Action project can go beyond being “another day on the calendar” if you pull together people and groups in new ways.

**Essential Recruiting Questions**

- What are the best things going in your community right now?
- Who do people in your community look to for leadership?
- Who are well-connected youth in your community? Where do people gather in your community?
- Who values education and community Youth Action locally?
- Who is usually involved in these projects? Who is not? Why or why not?

**Create a list of key stakeholders in the community.** How can you involve the following groups?

- Local Businesses
- Youth Action Clubs (Rotary, Lions, Elks, Kiwanis, etc)
• Youth Organizations or Youth Councils
• Athletic Groups or Associations
• Elected and Appointed officials
• Corporations (especially those that involve their employees)
• Nonprofit Organizations
• Fraternal Organizations
• Local Public officials and Agencies
• Neighborhood Associations
• Media
• International NGO's for international projects

**GET READY: Planning a Project**

Youth Action is the perfect opportunity to organize a large Youth Action project that can engage all community members. When working with new youth or adult allies, it is especially important to monitor their experience, since it will likely influence their future decisions and ideas about their community, Youth Action, and The Freechild Project. Carefully consider what will make the experience meaningful and provide an environment in which the participants can learn and grow. Ideally, the project will connect young people to opportunities that are available year-round.

Using your overall vision, purposes, and main goals think about how you want the Youth Action project (s) to look and what you want the project (s) to articulate to the community and/ or the media. How many people should you expect? What do you want people to get out of the experience? (for example, understanding community needs and strengths, leadership skills, understanding of issues related to supporting military families). What long-term impact do you want to facilitate?

Your community's unique social needs and the issues you choose to address impact the size and scope of your project and its site(s). Decide how many and what types of
sites you should find based on how many young people and adults you want to take action. Some groups organize a few large sites, like clean-up projects, to accommodate large numbers of youth, while other communities prefer one or multiple smaller sites for fewer numbers of participants. Choose sites where youth activists can see and experience their impact. You can also launch your own project to change the community without partner organizations. Hold meetings at home, build camaraderie at school, and take action without other organizations.

Always consider and ask these logistical questions when planning:

- What equipment is needed to complete the project and who will acquire/provide it?
- Will fellow youth staff be on hand to help with orientation and provide support on the Youth Action project?
- How far is the site from the morning kick-off site? Is the site accessible to young people and/or participants with disabilities?
- If the project is outdoors, what happens if it rains?

Remember that a project with too many young people involved and not enough meaningful work can spell disaster.

**GET READY: How to Recruit Inactive or New Youth**

Orientation to Youth Action project should be no longer than 30 minutes and should address three major issues:

- Introduction to Youth Action and The Freechild Project
- Background information on the school/site and related issues: Ask the building lead to lead this part of the orientation. Give him/her a specific time limit and ask for background on the organization, as well as insights into the broader issues the school deals with on a daily basis. Discuss the agency’s ongoing
needs to inspire youth and adult allies to make a long-term commitment to Youth Action.

GET READY: Getting the Resources You Need

No one wants to meet roadblocks, but when we do, we have to know how to overcome them. The good news? The tools youth need for Youth Action already exist—you just need to tap into them. Sometimes you have them, sometimes your friends or family has them, and they are always in your community, even when you can't see them. The following steps are designed to help you get the resources you need for Youth Action.

Step 1. Figure Out What You Need. Start by brainstorming two things:

- What are the problems and challenges in your community?
- What are some ways to solve those problems?

Use the answers to figure out what you actually need, and pick the challenges that get in the way the most for Youth Action. Strategically, you'll want to remember why you're doing what you're doing. Don't be afraid to think too big, and remember you can get what you need in steps.

Step 2. Prepare By Getting The Facts. Contact organizations with youth programs that already have what you want for Youth Action. Find out ways that they have gone about getting the resources they need and use that information too.

- Who needs to know about and support Youth Action?
- What research do you need to do?
- If you want a better library in your neighborhood, name what actions do you need to take and whom should you talk to in order to get it done.
• If you want to train youth how to change your community, what things and topics do you want included?

**Step 3. Figure Out What To Say.** Once you have your list of needs and facts, it will be important for everyone in your crew—including just you, if you’re work alone—to agree to “messages” or “talking points.” These are the standard phrases that will be used again and again and which are easy enough for each youth to be able to remember. It will be important to have your talking points include your needs and facts as well as the most compelling reasons why your “ask” should be approved.

Remember:
- Before you ask anyone for anything, give careful thought to why and when you need it- your first "ask" might be your only one.
- Document the reasons you need certain items. This may be useful for future "asks". It might look like this: "Four gardening hoes; Two for each community garden plot" or like this: "Conduct a community drive for spray paint for a new youth-created graffiti mural, intended to establish ownership and belonging for youth in our city."
- What is the expected outcome if you get what you need? Make sure you let givers know that, as well as the recipients of your intended action.

**Step 4. Find Your Partners.** What youth or adults would make a good partner in finding what Youth Action needs? If your action will provide children with tutoring assistance, why not attempt to find partners within local PTAs or education organizations? Finding your partners can be easier than it sounds—brainstorm and research as many area organizations or individuals to support your program.

Not everyone is going to be interested in partnering with you, but don’t be afraid to ask. Also, don’t rule anyone out! The first step in getting partners for Youth Action is asking them if they are interested in being a visible partner and ally to youth who are
changing your community. Also, don’t discount the partners who are already visible. Make sure you include them in your strategy.

**Step 5. Get The Word Out.** Make sure that everyone affected by Youth Action is aware what your needs are—including young people themselves, as well as parents, nonprofit staff, and adults in schools. You don't need to do a direct ask of them, but that wouldn't hurt! Then, get the word out to the public. Talk with local businesses, share with area foundations, and ask faith-based organizations around your area. Also, share your ideas with local websites and blogs for them to post. Let people know what Youth Action needs to succeed! Also, make petitions and gather letters of support from children, youth, and parents.

**Step 6. Set It Up.** Set up your contacts with donors and resource-providers. If you have petitions and/or letters of support, bring them to share. Remember to plan your connections with donors and givers and other resource sources, and share your talking points! It will help everything go better.

**Step 7. Work It Out.** Remember that looking for resources does not guarantee actually getting them, but try your hardest. Always follow up with people, and always send a thank you or acknowledgement to everyone who helped, even if the problem was not solved. Remember, don’t give up! You're starting to build support for your afterschool program and can do MORE!

**GET READY: The Kick-off Event And Closing Celebration**

The kick-off event sets the tone for the day and initiates the spirit of Youth Action. Hold your kick-off on first day of Youth Action, and use it as a central gathering place and pre-Youth Action pep rally. If young people and adults will disperse to different sites, arrange for transportation from the kick-off, and transport people to the closing celebration at the end of the day. The closing celebration gives people an opportunity
to share experiences with others who worked on other sites, relax, and have fun. This is also a great time to have public officials or other community leaders address youth activists. Both the kick-off and the closing celebration are excellent opportunities for local media to interview youth and learn more about Youth Action. Have media kits ready and available at a special check-in area for media. Decorate the closing celebration location with banners, balloons, and streamers. Invite elected and appointed officials, members of the media, and other personalities well in advance to draw more attention. Programming for these events varies tremendously. The kick-off event should be short, no more than thirty minutes. It is important to get people to their sites promptly to meet the day’s expectations. Music (provided by a school band, radio DJ, etc.) always gets people excited and ready to work. Ask people to come a half-hour early to sign-in and eat breakfast (if applicable), so when the kick-off ends they will be ready to go. It is also useful to let people know what time transportation will leave the kick-off site.
**STEP TWO: TAKE ACTION**

This is the stage where youth do Youth Action projects they have spent the last few weeks designing. Action can be challenging: young people can be forced to manage their Youth Action project while being confronted with community issues that are difficult or unjust. However, by gaining real experience, building new relationships and taking time to reflect, youth can realize the need for and importance of meaningful Youth Action to their communities.

**TAKE ACTIONS: Types of Youth Action**

There are three different kinds of Youth Action:

**Direct Youth Action**—Action directly with people in order to meet the mission of The Freechild Project that encourages personal connections to individuals and causes. Examples include working with teachers to develop environment-themed lesson plans; leading a campaign to have local insurance companies sponsor health-focused activities for students, and; Providing vocational skills to incarcerated youth or adults.

**Indirect Youth Action**—Organizational assistance and strategic operations are developed through “back office”-type support. Examples include making re-useable clay dinnerware for low-income families and shelters; raising money and resources for schools, and; developing an online website that allows students to collaborate using safe online social networking activities.

**Advocacy** – Communicating with others in order to increase public awareness, advocacy work helps youth and adults establish and understand the necessity of Youth Action. Examples include creating a social marketing campaign to promote local issues; creating PSAs advertising community
solutions to community issues, and; conducting a survey and presenting findings to local change-makers.

**TAKE ACTION: Learning**

Everyone can always learn more! Young people and adults have a lot to teach each other, especially through Youth Action. Whether you’re planning to change the whole wide world, change your community or school, or make changes at home, there are many things you can learn about. Here is a list of different topics that might help Youth Action go further!

- Planning Youth Action
- Community Leadership Development
- Leading from Within
- Self-Leadership
- Building Collaboration
- Increasing Levels of Responsibility
- Facilitative Leadership
- Building Social Networks from Real Time to Online
- Nontraditional Youth Leadership
- Understanding Adultism
- Using Games for Social Change
- Getting Ready to be Involved
  - Being *Real* Youth
- Identifying Stereotypes Affecting Youth
- Examining Media Bias Against Youth
- Creating Roles for Youth and Adults
- and much more!

**TAKE ACTION: Sustainable Projects**
Instead of creating one-day or one-week events where youth can stop by and run, try to create opportunities that foster sustainability, effectiveness and connectedness among youth and adult allies.

- Create a Youth Action Coalition that can work directly with community leaders or on its own to change your community.
- Create youth/parent/community leader agreements that state the expectations that youth hold for their community, schools, city government, and adult leaders.
- Investigate behavior towards youth throughout your community, possibly creating a survey asking youth and adults about their attitudes and habits with young people.
- Provide youth workshops to help youth learn how to help their communities through Youth Action.
- Work with adult allies to print a quarterly newsletter for your community.
- Promote a commitment from young people in order to increase pressure on community leaders to change.
- Advocate for Meaningful Student Involvement throughout the education system.
- Require young people to volunteer a minimum of 18 hours a year throughout the community.
- Youth should recruit other youth by presenting information at community events and hosting open houses to talk about Youth Action.
- Create a creativity program to encourage creative Youth Action.
- Create a slideshow about Youth Action and give presentations about changing the world.
- Raise awareness among youth about the importance of social change.
- Propose real policy changes in your community reflecting what matters.
- Advocate for policy changes that bring healthier food choices to your school and community, incorporating physical activity into the school day for everyone.
- Host a community health fair.
- Encourage physical activity throughout your community. An example may be organizing a community walk and promoting it for all community members.
- Disseminate community information, such as social service brochures, health-focused websites, or other tools to youth and adults publicizing social change messages.
- Create an artistic social change display, like a poster that depicts the negative effects of discrimination or a health-related mural.
- Hold a poetry slam, and ask participants to share about social change they’ve experienced through Youth Action.
- Write a grant application.
- Develop a youth-driven reading program focused on youth supporting literacy for all learners of any age. Award learners as they reach each successive reading time level.
- Host a summer Youth Action fair for all youth to explore their world changing interests. Advertise the fair to young people and families, and when possible provide a program for youth prior to the fair to generate interest and provide ideas for action.
- Provide opportunities for young people with incarcerated parents or parents in the military who are deployed to access the Internet regularly to talk with their parents.
- Develop a regular opportunity for young parents to receive free childcare.

**Take Action: Invite the Outside In**

By involving public officials, journalists, magazines, newspapers, television, and radio broadcasters in your Youth Action, young people will be able to reach a broader audience, ensure higher impact, and create awareness around their issue. Not only does it draw attention to the community or issue, but it can provide meaningful
recognition for young people, The Freechild Project, the sponsors, and your community.
**Step Three: Look Close**

Reflection happens anytime we look back at a project and identify what was learned, what worked and what didn’t work. Reflection and critical evaluation have an important role throughout Youth Action by having youth analyze, question, and share what they have experienced. Reflection is a time to create new meaning and understandings through conversations and potential “a-ha!” moments. Reflection can happen at any point throughout Youth Action, either with a brief check-in at the end of a meeting or with a written submission by youth at the end of a project, or a combination of those approaches and others. By continuing to reflect, you can ensure that everything is being connected back to the goals of Youth Action. Evaluation can help local Youth Action leaders to change the activities, and can also powerfully engage youth in identifying next steps in Youth Action, their community and the world.

**Look Closes Reflection Doesn’t Need a Mirror**

Reflection is a vital part of making Youth Action effective for all youth and volunteers. Using reflection, youth think about how the experience, knowledge and skills they acquire through Youth Action relates to their own lives. In daily life it is often easy to get so busy that we miss the meaning within an experience. Reflection gives everyone a chance to relax and explore what they are learning and how it affects their lives. Reflection can happen spontaneously or it can be a structured process. Following are some different ways youth can reflect on their Youth Action activities:

- Describe what happened
- Talk about the changes they made
- Discuss their thoughts and feelings
- Think about how the activity could be improved
- Generate new ideas
• Identify questions that need to be considered
• Receive feedback

**Look Closely: Ideas for Reflection Activities**

• Have youth write letters to public officials or other professionals about their Youth Action experience and what solutions they see for long-lasting change.
• Design small focus groups where youth reflect upon a specific component of Youth Action project.
• Encourage youth to take pictures throughout the entire process and then have them create photo essays to be shared.
• Ask youth to create individual blogs/online journals sharing their ideas and encouraging other people to post their opinions as well.
• Have youth write op-eds to different newspapers and follow through to encourage that they get published.

**Look Closely: Questioning and Strategic Thinking**

Youth should be encouraged throughout action to question and think complexly about Youth Action. For example, if you take the common Youth Action example of community clean-up days, youth should be prompted to examine the bigger and more involved picture:

• Why is the community dirty? Does the local community value its public spaces? Is the school seen as part of the community, or a separate entity? How much attention does the neighborhood put into the condition of its public spaces? Do all young people, parents and other adults regularly see no littering rules or guidelines around the school?
The Freechild Project Youth Action Tool Guide

- How does this un-cleanliness affecting issues such as everyone’s behavior and quality of life?
- If there is unclaimed trash in the streets, why is there so much trash in our community and where are the trash receptacles? If people don’t use them, why not?

Youth Action activities can merely provide a temporary initiative to involve young people when a project takes place without engaging youth in strategic thinking and critical action. Too often youth have found themselves saying, “Ok, we cleaned up the community, but now what?” Questioning and strategic thinking can answer these questions and take your Youth Action project to the next level.

**Look Closes Youth Evaluation**

After the action component is through and reflection is finished, it is important to allow the youth to critically evaluate and analyze Youth Action project and its outcome. They should consider what did and did not work as well as what they would do again, what they would change, how the project succeeded, and how it needs to be improved. Provide them with questions that ask them to consider how they developed throughout the project, how much effort they put in, what they learned, where they think they excelled, what challenges they met, and how they would change if they could do it over again. By giving this self-evaluation a reflective format, youth will be encouraged to deeply mull over their performance, role in the project, and personal accountability.

**Look Closes Future Action**
Based on the project evaluations and the post-action conclusions that the youth arrive at, future action should always be planned. There are questions to consider when planning for future action:

- How can we ensure that this issue is still being seen and not forgotten?
- What resources are needed to sustain our successful work?
- What is still needed? What do we want to look at now?
- Can we pass on future action to the next generation of young people?
- How can we incorporate future action into our next curriculum?
Step Four: Celebrate

Celebrating the work of youth, highlighting the community, creating awareness around the issue and providing recognition to all participants is very important to a Youth Action. Celebration ensures that the Youth Action is seen and heard and that youth and community participants are valued and applauded for their roles as citizens and social leaders. Whether your celebration is a highly visible networking event, elaborately organized learning festival, or a simple and intimate showcase, attention to this stage of the curriculum is essential to continuing Youth Action project, reinforcing a commitment for global change, and bolstering youth empowerment.

Celebrate Recognition and Incentive

Youth Action can be recognized in many ways and not just within the school. The work could be displayed publicly and have an article written about the youth and the project in the local newspaper or school newsletter. Appreciation for Youth Action serves as an incentive for young people to continue onto future action while it can motivate other youth become engaged in action, too. Being recognized for participating in positive change and making social contributions can be important in many communities.

It is also necessary for you to recognize the community partners that you worked with. Incentive and visibility are important because when a group, business or organization knows that their work will be publicly highlighted it is a reason for them to participate. Lastly, ensure that youth respect the participating community partners with thoughtful gratitude and thank-you notes.

Celebrate Celebration Activities
• Youth Action Festivals that demonstrate how youth help the community
• Public awareness workshops
• Awards ceremony inviting press, political officials, and community leaders
• Press events
• School assembly to talk about Youth Action
• Collaborative party with community partners and youth activists
• Creating a website, handbook or workshop to train others

Additionally, demonstration is important in the effort to increase The Freechild Project’s visibility as a change-making organization. Engaging more youth and adult allies in teaching others about your Youth Action project helped your community subsequently sustain and catalyze new and renewed youth engagement.

However, celebration should not been seen as the end of your Youth Action project and certainly not the definitive end of Youth Action itself. Celebration can happen throughout the entire year and beyond. By celebrating small accomplishments you will reinforce that even the tiniest of positive developments are noteworthy, no matter what size your community is. This stage should replenish the commitment to young people to Youth Action and stress the importance of continuing to tackle local issues.
STEP 5: MAKE A PLAN

If you have read this far, you are ready to plan for Youth Action. Even after reading all the information in this guide, you might want to identify Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How Youth Action is going to happen. Here’s a guide you can use.

WHO needs to be involved?

- Who does Youth Action affect immediately?
  - Who does it indirectly affect?
  - Who else wants to see change in your community?
  - What do they stand for?
  - Who and what do they stand against?
- What people do we need to take action?
  - Are we the people most affected by the problem?
  - Are we engaging the people most affected?
- Do we need a small team for our Youth Action?
  - Do we need a large group, mass movement, citywide action, national effort, or global movement?
  - Is there a larger effort already happening that I have learned about?
- What specific jobs (Background researching, phone calling, web outreach, group meetings) can specific people do to get our aims done?
- Why do we need these jobs done?
- Who can help us?
  - Can our friends, people we know, people we don’t know, youth workers, teachers, college professors, parents, community activists, or others help us?
- What skills do people—young and olders—in our community have?

WHAT are we trying to accomplish?
• Have we explored our assumptions?
  o What is the point of what you’re trying to do through Youth Action?
  o What’s the belief behind that argument?
  o Is the outcome from that argument what you are trying to accomplish?
  o What else should be added to make it happen?

• Do we have reasonable, accomplishable goals?
• Are our goals measurable—can we see the outcomes?

**WHEN** are we trying to make change happen?

• Do we have a timeline set?
• Do we have reasonable expectations?
• Have we asked people who have done this before?

**WHERE** are we trying to make change?

• What is the scope of our action
  o Should we focus on our neighborhood, city, state, nation, or is our Youth Action global?
  o Why work beyond our community?
• Where does our action immediately affect?
• What are the traditional places in your community to get the resources you need?
  o Do they go to schools, churches, businesses, community groups, or other places?
• What are the nontraditional places in your community to get the resources you need?
  o Do people go to their family, friends, children, youth, seniors, activist groups...

**HOW** do we get the job done?
• Do we need to learn more about the issue?
• Do we need to conduct background research?
• Do we need to map our community?
• What can our culture provide to our action?
  o What customs, language, morals, literature, dance, art, poetry, philosophy, religion, ideals and rituals can help us?
• What physical materials are needed?
  o Where can we acquire those materials?
    ▪ What are the instruments, tools, machines, clothes, or other things we need?
    ▪ Why do we need them?
• Do we need space for our work?
  o Can we meet at someone’s house, in our school, at the community center, or in the park?
• What about money?
**Wrap Up**

Ultimately, Youth Action will be best implemented when meaningful connections and deep impact are made throughout the community. The information provided in this toolkit is intended to encourage local young people as you design Youth Action. By giving young people these tools, The Freechild Project is working to ensure the needs of our communities go neither unnoticed nor unsolved—and that the absolute right people are changing the world right now—and that is youth.
SHARE WITH FREECHILD

Cut and paste the following email and send the info to us and we might feature your story! The Freechild Project tells stories in workshops, shares them through social media, and spreads them in our publications. Share yours today!

Name of your Youth Action:
What Community(ies) are you focused on:
City, State:
Start Date: End Date:
Ongoing? Yes No

PARTICIPANTS

1. What was the total number of participants?
2. How many of this total number were youth?
3. How many were adults?
4. How many youth participated in the following:
   □ Researching community needs
   □ Selecting the project
   □ Designing the project
   □ Participating in specific project roles (i.e. Contacting media, taking pictures, developing budgets, fundraising)
   □ Evaluating the project
5. Please describe any feedback or reactions of community residents or project beneficiaries regarding Youth Action and other project aspects.

TOPICS
6. Please select topics that describe your project from the list below or add new topics in the spaces provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>Rural issues</td>
<td>Curfews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship</td>
<td>Urban issues</td>
<td>Defining youth rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hip hop</td>
<td>Democracy issues</td>
<td>Job discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth media</td>
<td>Community planning</td>
<td>Juvenile Injustice &amp; Incarceration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialism</td>
<td>Community policy-making</td>
<td>Lowering the voting age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Globalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Illegal child labor</td>
<td>Foster care involvement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Foundation involvement</td>
<td>Youth liberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeschooling</td>
<td>Government involvement</td>
<td>Youth rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School reform (offsite)</td>
<td></td>
<td>School-to-prison pipeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex education</td>
<td>Nonprofit involvement</td>
<td>Civil rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students rights in schools</td>
<td>Research representation</td>
<td>Youth media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching about social change in school</td>
<td>Education reform</td>
<td>Media bias and stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ends of Grading</td>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Youth rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unschooling</td>
<td>Sex education</td>
<td>Youth on nonprofit boards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stop Testing</td>
<td>Anti-war and nonviolence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ending School Closures</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>National youth orgs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>International youth</td>
<td>Training for youth voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay, bisexual, lesbian, transsexual, transgendered, queer, and questioning youth</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Youth development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless youth</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Other social issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational partnerships</td>
<td>Sustainable agriculture</td>
<td>Other rights issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Public health</td>
<td>Other youth issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adultism</td>
<td>Other education issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ephebiphobia</td>
<td>Other economic issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporal Punishment</td>
<td>Other creativity issues</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Other identity issues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>List other issues here:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**ACTION SUMMARY**

7. What were the objectives of Youth Action?

8. How did you determine the need for Youth Action?

9. Please describe any other stakeholders you worked with to achieve your objectives:

10. Please describe Youth Action from beginning to end:

11. Who benefited from Youth Action?

12. Why was this Youth Action successful?

**YOUTH ACTION DESCRIPTION**

13. Please give a brief description of your Youth Action. This description should include an overview, including what activities were involved, what was accomplished, and how the project was connected to the mission of The Freechild Project. (Please limit this description to one or two paragraphs.)

14. Who helped conduct your Youth Action project?
   - [ ] Youth
   - [ ] Parents
   - [ ] Teachers
15. Which stakeholders did you partner with?

- Youth-serving groups
- Non-youth serving nonprofits
- Faith-based groups
- Issue groups
- Labor unions
- Educational institutions
- Businesses
- Corporations
- Foundations
- All levels of government.
20. *Assessment and Evaluation:* How did youth evaluate the project? Were beneficiaries of the Youth Action involved in the evaluation?

21. *Additional Information:* What else did you do or learn that might be useful to others undertaking similar projects?

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**Your Background Information**

Name:
Do you work with an organization? Which one?
Do you have a title?
City:
State/Province (where applicable):
Postal Code (where applicable):
Email Address:
Daytime Phone:

Please Note: The above information is for contact purposes.

Would you like us to credit you for submitting this project? ___Yes ___No
If yes, how would you like to be identified (e.g., “Jane Doe, Carver School, Duluth, Minn.”)?

**Editorial Policy**

I understand that The Freechild Project does not use all project examples submitted.
If The Freechild Project chooses to use my project example, its staff will edit it to meet its editorial style, and a staff member will contact me for additional information.
and possibly supporting materials to be used as downloads. As part of the editorial process, proper names of schools, organizations, and people will be removed.

By submitting a project example, I agree that The Freechild Project will have a perpetual, non-exclusive right to use, as it sees fit, the project example and all related downloadable materials. To review The Freechild Project’s Usage Agreement, email info@freechild.org. By submitting a project example, I'm agreeing to the Usage Agreement.

I have read and agree to the Usage Agreement. _____Yes  _____No
SUGGESTED TIMELINE

PLANNING

- Youth Action Introduction
- Identifying Youth Action Issue
- Goals and objectives
- Teamwork
- Identifying Partners and Support
- Preparation for Youth Action
- Fundraising

ACTION

- Conduct Youth Action Project
- Email info@freechild.org to register your project
- Research and Documentation
- Documentation
- Ongoing Reflection

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

- Compile reflections
- Photo Journals, Evaluative Essays, Op Eds and Online
- Celebration events
Also Available From The Freechild Project

*The Freechild Project Youth-Driven Programming Guide.* This guide is an introduction to youth-driven programming for nonprofits, government agencies, and other youth-serving organizations. The booklet gives a definition and compares approaches, and then provides planning tools, evaluations and assessments, and more. It includes the Ladder of Youth Voice, rubrics for assessing youth-driven programming, and links to examples and resources that readers can explore on their own. By Adam Fletcher. (2013)

*The Freechild Project Youth Voice Toolkit.* Comprised of a series of one- and two-sheet publications, these tools identify practices, practical considerations and critical concepts that are focused on engaging Youth Voice, particularly among historically disengaged young people. By Adam Fletcher. (2011)

*The Freechild Project Youth Engagement Workshop Guide.* 24 hands-on, interactive workshops designed to teach youth and adults about how to successfully engage young people. Includes workshops on communication, planning, and other topics. By Adam Fletcher. (2010)

*The Freechild Project Guide to Social Change Led By and With Young People.* Centering on the Cycle of Youth Engagement, this is a summary of the social change issues and actions addressed by and with young people around the world. By Adam Fletcher and Joseph Vavrus. (2007)


*Firestarter Youth Power Curriculum.* This is a collection of activities for youth and adult facilitators who want to empower young people to take action. Includes dozens of topics and action items, and completely available online. By Adam Fletcher. (2001)