

pathways to policy



...

a step-by-step playbook
for young people who want
to change the world

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Where did the Playbook come from?

The Pathways to Policy Playbook was developed for youth involved with [The Bigger Picture](#), a youth-generated type 2 diabetes prevention campaign that harnesses authentic artistic youth voices to end type 2 diabetes in young people by exposing the disease's social and environmental drivers. Participants in The Bigger Picture learn how racially targeted marketing, lack of affordable healthy food and drink options, and other institutional factors lead to higher rates of type 2 diabetes in young people, especially in low-income communities and communities of color, where these systemic problems are more serious.

After participating in The Bigger Picture, young people often want to change the structural factors that increase type 2 diabetes prevalence in their community and are eager to learn how. This resource aims to help young people get started with that. The examples in this guide focus on strategies to address the structural and environmental causes of type 2 diabetes through public policy, with an emphasis on policies that can be addressed at the local government level. These are known as public policies. However, the tactics are applicable to any policy issue that is important to young people, whether the policy is set by the government or by a school, business, or place of worship. Similarly, this guide was created for—and with—young people in California, and because of that, it uses a lot of examples from California, but the principles of the Playbook apply nationwide.

If this sounds like it's right for you, then...

Welcome to the Playbook

The Playbook provides an introduction to policy change for you and your allies. What do you want for your community? Better food? Safer parks? Better bus service? Something else? If you already care about a particular issue but you have not yet become involved in advocating for or against policies related to your issue, this guide is for you. The goal of the guide is to give you enough background information about policy change that you can take some kind of action step on an issue that matters to you. Depending on where you are in the policy process, you might go through this guide from beginning to end, or you might just read a couple of sections.



WHAT IS POLICY?

You can think of “policy” as a catch-all term for different kinds of rules. Policies are everywhere: from federal, state, and local government to local businesses and schools. Even rules like your curfew could be considered family “policies”! Policies determine what people can say, do, be, or have—and what consequences they face if they break the rules. They affect every aspect of our lives, right down to the clothes we wear. What keeps you from leaving the house wearing just your pajamas? It depends on where you’re going. “No shoes, no shirt, no service” is a store policy that applies to customers. A dress code is a school’s policy that applies to its students’ clothes.

The examples in the Playbook focus on the rules that your local government is responsible for, but you can use a lot of the same principles to change the rules at your school, at your place of worship, or at a local business. Some are guiding principles that can be bent or disregarded; others are enforced strictly and may have serious consequences if they are broken.

Why would you want to change a policy? Rules should do something helpful or prevent something harmful. The same goes for policy: Whoever makes a policy should be able to justify why it’s needed. What if a rule isn’t working? Or it’s unfair? Or, even worse, what if it’s actually hurting people? If that’s the case, then you’ll probably want to try to change it. That’s what this guide is about.

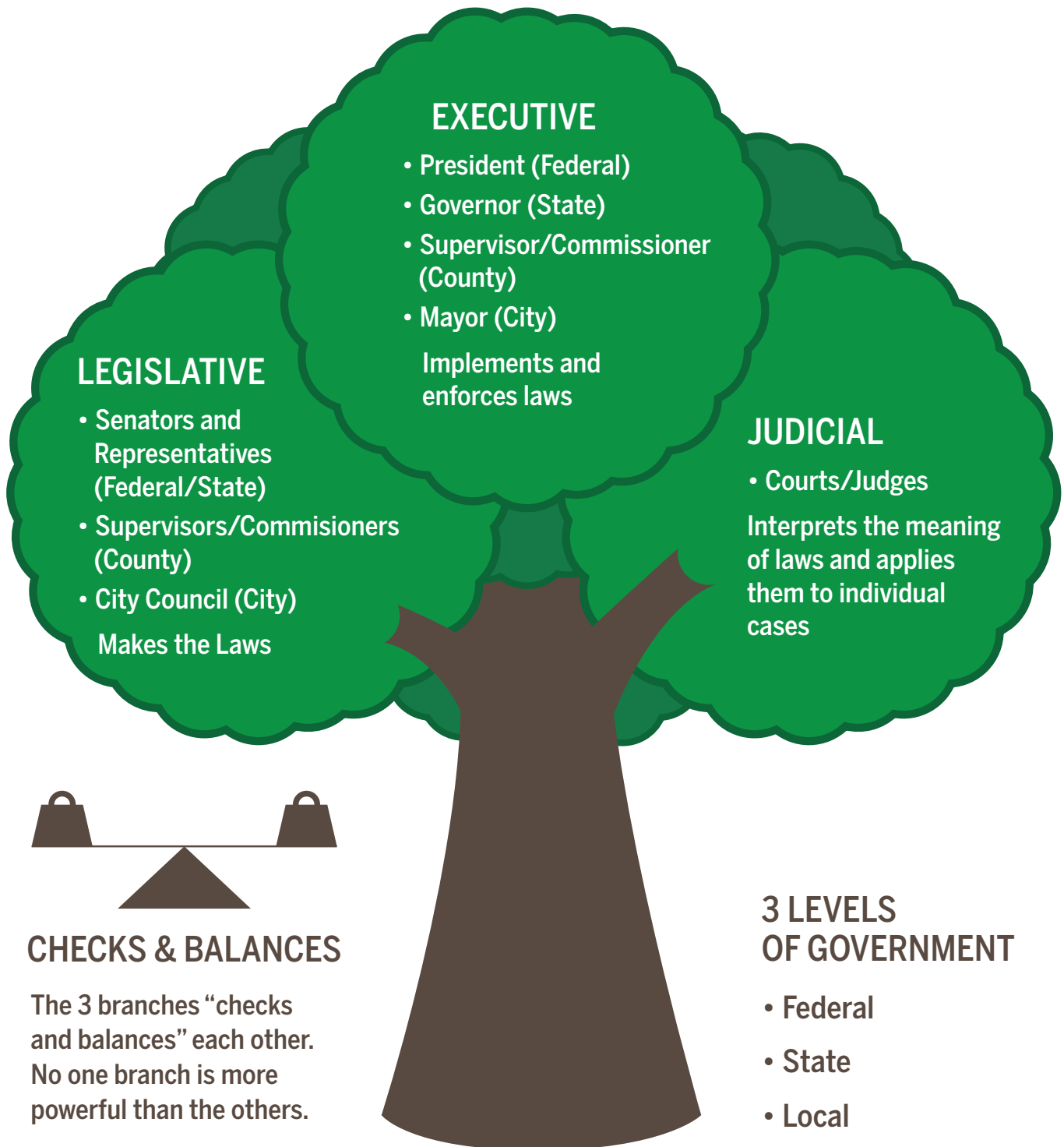
Here are some more examples of what counts as policy and what doesn’t from ChangeLab Solutions’ [What Is Policy?](#) fact sheet.

Not Policy	Policy
Program: A local government creates a program that offers incentives to convenience stores that voluntarily sell fruits and vegetables.	A city council adopts a resolution offering funds to convenience stores in the community that sell a minimum amount of fruits and vegetables.
Education: A business puts up signs encouraging employees to walk more.	A business makes a policy that provides up to 2 hours of paid time per week for employees to exercise.
Education: A school includes information about the harms of smoking in its health class curriculum.	A school board adopts a policy requiring all schools to be tobacco free, both indoors and outdoors.
Practice: A church pastor promises the mayor that the church playground will be open to the community.	A church board adopts an open use policy that allows the public to use the church playground.

10 Steps to Advocacy

- 01 | Prepare yourself**  What do you care about? What can you do to feel good even if advocacy is sometimes hard?
- 02 | Build your team**  Team up with at least one other person or group to support your cause.
- 03 | Choose your issue**  Choose an issue that connects with what you and other people care about.
- 04 | Learn about your issue**  Learn about your issue from sources you can trust.
- 05 | Pick a policy demand**  Decide exactly what you want and by when.
- 06 | Choose a target**  Identify who has the power to give you what you want.
- 07 | Identify allies & opponents**  Brainstorm your friends, the haters, and who's in the middle to win over to your cause.
- 08 | Actually do the tactic**  Don't just talk the talk – walk the walk. Go do your tactic for real!
- 09 | Celebrate your wins**  Tactic done? Learned something new? CONGRATS!
- 10 | Do it again!**  Rewind and remix – take another step to make the world a better place.

The 3 Branches of GOVERNMENT



ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE

Prepare Yourself

What to expect out of the policy advocacy process

We asked a 26-year-old organizer who's been doing advocacy work for 10 years what his biggest piece of advice is for young people who are just starting out:

“I guess my biggest advice would be to know [your] why. To know why [you] want to get involved. Because I think that’s the ultimate source of momentum. And I think once you have a close connection to what the issue is that you feel passionate about, it really helps. And then, also, I think, embracing the curiosity of how politics plays out on a process [level], on a human to human interpersonal [level]. I think the more curious young folks are, the more willing they are to lean into curiosity, the more profoundly rewarding the answers we seek out will be. So, for me that would be the advice—to really just get curious about what’s possible. Get curious about, when people tell you something’s not possible, why they’re saying that. And to not let that ... do not let the answers you hear deter you from actually trying to achieve the change you want to see.” — Alex, 26

Changing policies takes patience and persistence. It can be difficult to even figure out where to go with your ideas—or demands—for how to make things better. And even if you do figure out whom to talk to, there are often powerful people or institutions that made things the way they are. It can be hard to get enough support on your side to make decisionmakers pay attention.

Doing policy advocacy requires dedication and commitment. The process can be long, and you might not get exactly what you want. It doesn't mean you shouldn't try, but it does mean you should be realistic about what you are doing. Here are some recommendations to make that easier:

Find your fire

Deeply caring about the work you're doing can go a long way toward keeping you motivated through the ups and downs (and maybe some boring meetings) that are part of policy change. Ask yourself, “What issue in my community do I care about the most?” Better food at school? More water fountains? Safer neighborhoods? Better parks? Start there.

TRY IT OUT : A VISION FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

Sometimes it's hard to know where to start. Maybe you have a lot of ideas for improvements you'd like to see! If you need a little help deciding what to focus on, try this:

First, draw a picture of or write about what your school or community looks like now. Then, do the same for how you want it to be. Finally, start to think about what would have to happen for your vision to become a reality. Whom do you have to convince? How could it be paid for? You're already thinking about policy!

Here's a [longer version](#) of this activity if you want to do it in a group, especially if you're thinking about changes to what types of businesses or activities are permitted in your neighborhood.

Think about your goals

When you start to advocate for policy change, try to think of things you can achieve that aren't directly related to your policy goal. For example, building community by creating deeper connections with friends, family, and people who share your values and goals; learning more about an issue; and facing fears about public speaking are all important achievements on your path to policy change.

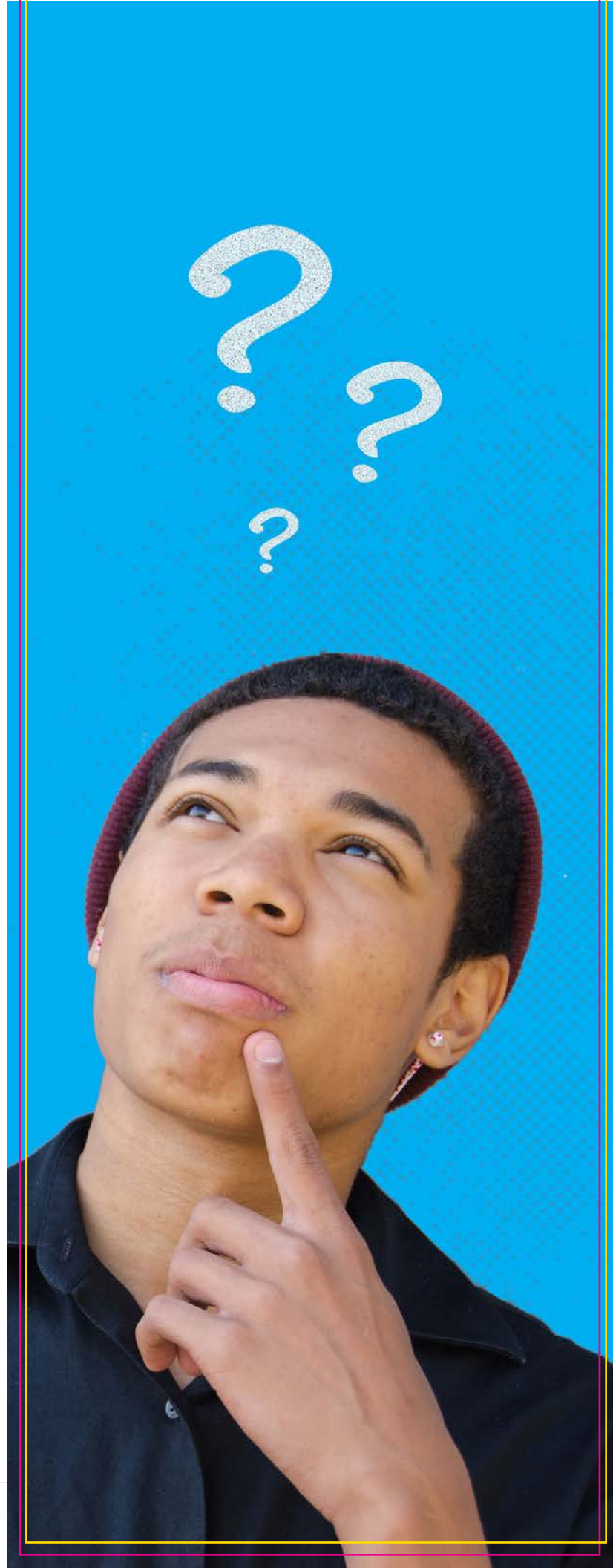
Keeping these other types of “wins” in mind can help make you feel successful even if progress toward your policy goal is slow or difficult. Listening and learning about issues in your community will help you refine your goals. We'll talk about strategies to help you listen, learn, and refine your goals more below, but always keep your goals in mind as you prepare yourself and try out new strategies. It will help you keep focused when things get confusing or difficult.

Take time for self-care

When you care about something a lot, it's easy to get wrapped up in it. Yes, you're part of a movement, but you're also a person with your own needs. In order to be an effective advocate, you need to know when it's time to take a break and recharge. So ask yourself: How do you take care of you?

Here are some self-care ideas:

- ✦ Exercising
- ✦ Making art
- ✦ Listening to, or playing, music
- ✦ Writing in a journal
- ✦ Sports
- ✦ Meditation



SELF CARE

Taking care of yourself is a really important part of sustaining yourself when things get hard and of meeting your goals. When we take time for self-care, we can show up as our best selves for our friends, families, and communities. That's why some people think of self-care as an important part of individual and community health. Public health practitioners use different terms or concepts such as “resilience” or “trauma-informed approaches” to describe self-care strategies. You can find more information about self-care, resilience, and trauma-informed strategies on the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's \(SAMHSA\) website](#).

Trying out meditation

Meditation can help you cope with stress by allowing your body and brain to relax. If you're curious, here are some ways to try it out:

- [Short guided \(audio\) meditations available for download in English and Spanish](#)
- [Pocket Mindfulness app](#). Pocket Mindfulness also has guided (written) meditations on its [website](#)
- [Greater Good in Action](#), a project of the University of California, Berkeley, has step-by-step mindfulness exercises for all levels
- [Mind Body Matters blog](#)



Find support

Making space for some “me time” is important, but sometimes you need to surround yourself with others, too. Spending time with friends or family—anyone who helps build you up—can help remind you of where you come from and whom you're working so hard to empower and protect. Share your frustrations or worries with people you trust. Let them know if you want their help or advice, or if you just want someone to listen.

You'll be a better advocate for your cause if you take care of yourself. You should encourage your team to take care of themselves, too.

Build Your Team

Ways to connect with other people who care about what you care about

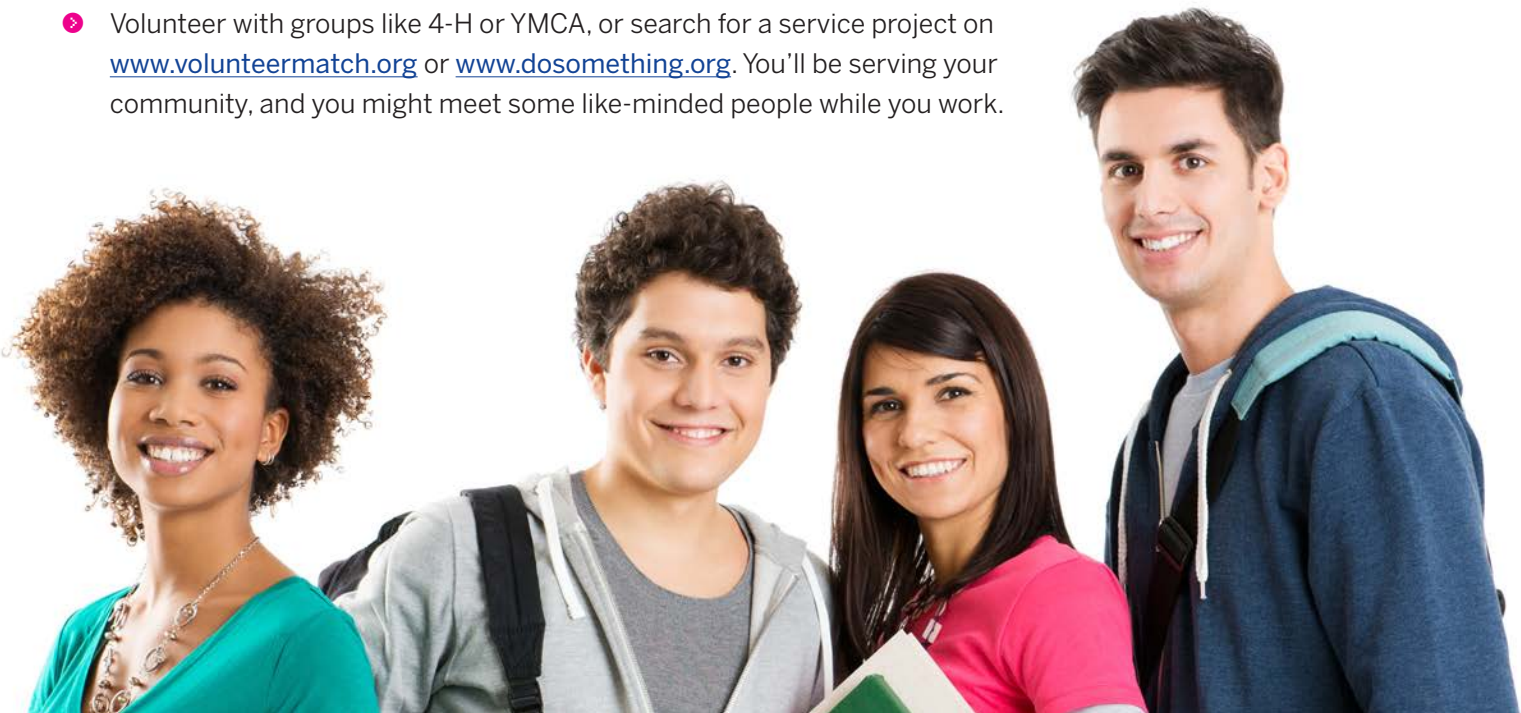
“What a small group. It seems pretty whack.’ I remember thinking this the first moment I stepped into that room. And then all of a sudden I ended up designing a T-shirt that, believe it or not, had a big impact on people, writing a script about teenagers who overdose, the important stuff, and becoming part of something so big that [had] seemed so small. I would say we’re pretty cool.” —Callie, 17

Change doesn't happen because of one person alone. A great way to advance your cause is to create strength in numbers by creating—or joining—a team of people who share your passion for change.

Join a team

Depending on where you are and what you care about, there might be groups already working on the issue you want to address. Here are some tips for how to find a team in your community:

- ✦ Search online. Try using different combinations of your issue with your city or neighborhood and see what comes up (for example: community gardens in [your city]).
- ✦ Ask a teacher about organizations that might be good to join.
- ✦ Check out fliers promoting interesting events or organizations. You might find fliers at school, at the library, at a coffee shop, at a recreation or community center, or at the bus stop.
- ✦ Go to events related to what you care about, such as poetry or book readings, conferences, or panel discussions and see who's there. Sometimes—especially at larger events—people from different organizations will sit at a table and talk to people walking by about their organization's work. This is a great opportunity to look for a team! Feel free to ask lots of questions. If you're feeling shy, remember that these organizations are always looking for more people to join them!
- ✦ Volunteer with groups like 4-H or YMCA, or search for a service project on www.volunteermatch.org or www.dosomething.org. You'll be serving your community, and you might meet some like-minded people while you work.



Make your own

Maybe there's no group near you that's already working on the issue you care about. That's okay! You can make your own group. Here are some recommendations from other young people involved in advocacy on how to recruit people to your cause:

- **Start with your friends.** They like you, you're comfortable around them, and you're likely to have a lot in common with them. Getting your friends on board with your advocacy efforts just makes sense! Telling your friends about the issue you're working on is also a good opportunity to practice talking about what you care about in a way that makes other people care about it, too. That will be important as you recruit more people to support your cause.

Worried you'll be bugging your friends if you try to get them involved in a cause you care about? Don't be! This is what a young person whose friend got him involved in advocacy had to say about his experiences:

"I would always hear her talking about it, and I thought to myself, 'Oh, I'm not that type of person. That's not my like, cake and butter, or whatever.' ... Well, then she dragged me to one of the meetings... And I actually quite enjoyed it. And then I went another week, the next week. And then I've been in it since, and this is going to be my second year in the group... It's really changed [me] a lot. Like, I'm more involved. I'm like ... before, I used to be really, really shy to talk to anybody. Now, I'm like, 'Okay, I will speak up.' I'll like, talk in class now." — Miguel, 16

- **Recruit people at school.** Beyond your immediate friend group, there are probably other people at your school who are interested in fixing the same community problems you are. Find out what the rules are for starting a club at your school. Becoming an official school club might give you a space to meet. Talk to a teacher you like to see if they'll be your club's faculty advisor. Plan to make an announcement in your classes about your club.
- **Recruit people in your neighborhood.** If the change you seek is in your neighborhood, then you'll definitely want to get your neighbors on board. To find people who are interested, you could hold an open meeting in a place nearby that's easy for people to get to, like a park, a library, or a community center. It's usually free or cheap to hold events in spaces like these if you reserve them in advance—call or go to their website to find out. To promote your event, you can put up fliers on bulletin boards, or in areas where a lot of people walk by, so people will know where and when to come. If there's a neighborhood Facebook group or email list (also known as a listserv), you could write a post telling people about your event there.
- **Create and share events on social media.** You know the drill here. Use your platform of choice to remind people about upcoming meetings or events. Once you have a few people on your team and you've decided what to focus on, you can use tools like [Thunderclap](#) to get your message out to a bigger audience and draw more supporters for your cause.



Examples of things to say to get your parent's support

I WANT TO GO TO A PROTEST DOWNTOWN ON SATURDAY FROM 1-6PM. I WILL KEEP IN TOUCH WITH YOU THE WHOLE TIME AND I WILL BE WITH TWO OTHER PEOPLE. THEIR NUMBERS ARE ... AND ...

I HOPE YOU BELIEVE IN ME AND MY CAUSE.

I PROMISE TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE AND STAY ON TOP OF MY OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES BUT PLEASE LET ME SPEND MORE TIME AND GO TO PLACES TO ADVOCATE.

IT WILL HELP ME FOR MY FUTURE.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR ME, AND I WOULD LOVE FOR YOU TO SUPPORT ME.



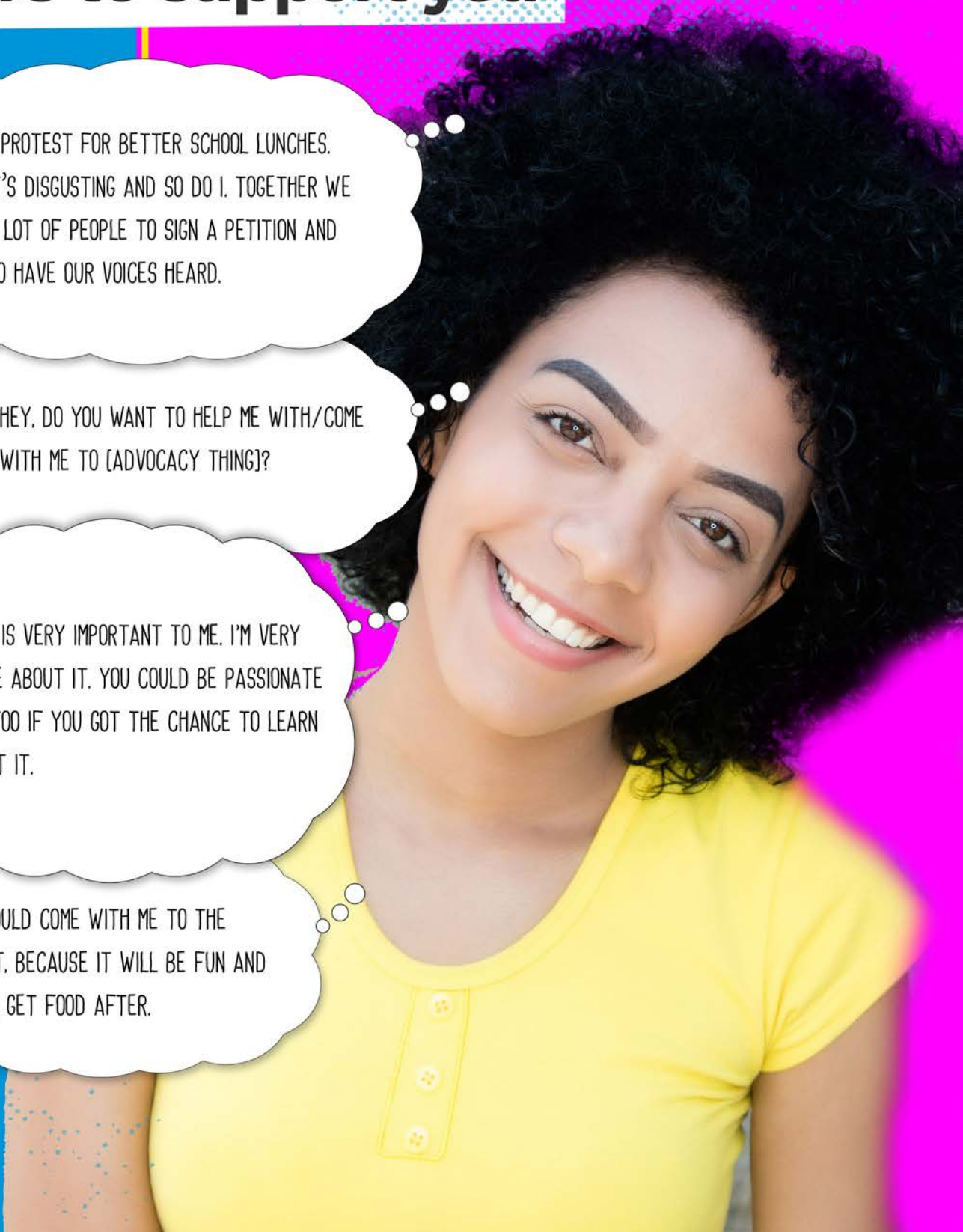
Examples of things to say to get your peers to support you

I WANT TO PROTEST FOR BETTER SCHOOL LUNCHES. YOU SAY IT'S DISGUSTING AND SO DO I. TOGETHER WE CAN GET A LOT OF PEOPLE TO SIGN A PETITION AND PROTEST TO HAVE OUR VOICES HEARD.

HEY, DO YOU WANT TO HELP ME WITH/COME WITH ME TO [ADVOCACY THING]?

THIS ISSUE IS VERY IMPORTANT TO ME. I'M VERY PASSIONATE ABOUT IT. YOU COULD BE PASSIONATE ABOUT IT TOO IF YOU GOT THE CHANCE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT IT.

YOU SHOULD COME WITH ME TO THE PROTEST, BECAUSE IT WILL BE FUN AND WE CAN GET FOOD AFTER.



Listen and Learn

“I didn’t know much about the council when I first started. It was a whole new experience for me to learn about the many things the program does for my community. I am a part of a research team and the most important thing I learned was making sure my sources are credible and reliable. Both of them are the biggest factor in making sure you have the right facts.” — Gabriela, 18

So you have a team and a cause. Now what? Before you jump to making demands, it’s a good idea to take some time to learn more about your issue. When you feel passionately about something, it’s easy to believe that you know how to address it. But if you want to make a change, you need more than your gut feeling to back up your ideas.

Changes to policy have consequences for everyone, so find out what other people think about the issue you’ve chosen. For example, let’s say you want your classmates to have more opportunities to be physically active. You think physical activity should be required at your school, and you’re planning to change the school district’s school wellness policy. But what do your classmates think? Maybe they’ve always hated gym class—if that’s the case, they might actually oppose your policy idea! Or maybe some of them would love to ride their bike to school and would support efforts to get bike lanes put on streets near your school. If you don’t ask them, you won’t know! And you’ll miss out on an opportunity to win over more allies for your cause.

Before you make too many decisions about the policy change you’ll pursue, you should stop to listen and learn. You’re looking for the answers to three questions: (1) What is happening now? (2) What has already happened? (3) What should happen next?

What is happening now?

A good way to start learning more details about the issue you care about is to follow it in the news. Even if picking up a paper copy of the daily news isn’t your thing, you can follow most news outlets on platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter.

If there’s a topic you already know you’re interested in, you can get updates by setting up a [Google Alert](#). You can also create a Google Alert for topics that interest you. That way, you can get emails once a day or once a week alerting you when there are news stories, blogs, or books, that contain your keywords of interest (e.g., “sugar sweetened beverage tax”). Or, if you’ve found an organization you like, you can see if it has positions on any policies and start learning more about these. You could also subscribe to the organization’s newsletter, or follow the organization on social media.

If you’re keeping an eye on a particular piece of legislation in your state, you may be able to get updates on it by going to your state government’s website and searching for the bill you’re interested in. Look for a link that says something like “Track” or “Track Bill” to set up email notifications. You can also set up a Google Alert using your state and the bill number to get updates whenever the bill is in the news. Some cities may do this, too—check out your local government’s website to find out.

You might feel overwhelmed by all the information out there and not know where to start. Here are some suggestions for getting the facts.

HOW CAN YOU GET INFO YOU CAN TRUST



Consider The Source

Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.



Read Beyond

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story.



Check the Date

Reporting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.



Is it a Joke

If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.



Check the Author

Is the author real? Do they have any expertise on the issue they are talking about? Keep in mind that opinion pieces and random people on social media aren't always trustworthy.



Check the Author's Biases

For instance, if a person will lose money from a new policy that is being proposed, they might be unfairly biased against that policy.



Check your Biases

Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgment.



Supporting Sources

Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.



Ask the Experts

Ask someone you trust, or consult a fact checking site.



Find Different Perspectives

Look for more than 1 source to get differing perspectives on an issue.

Modified from www.ifla.org/publications/node/11174

What has already happened?

Next, put what you've learned from the news into context: What's the history of what you want to change? Look into it. There are lots of ways to do this.

Start by asking people you trust (for example, teachers, librarians, leaders of extracurricular groups) how you can learn more about your issue. Take notes on what they recommend. If they give you the name of someone who would be good to talk to, follow up with them and ask the same questions!

Research can be a lot of work to take on with all your other responsibilities. That's why it's important to have a team—so you don't have to do this work alone. Divide the research among your team members, then come back and share what you learned. You can also use papers or group projects as opportunities to learn more about the issues you care about.

If you want to search on your own, start by using internet search terms to help you. For instance, if you care about “human rights,” “justice,” and “equality,” then search for your issue with these terms. For example, you could search for “food justice” or “health equity.” You can also ask a librarian for help with your search.

And remember: Not all knowledge is online. Talk to your parents, grandparents, or older neighbors to ask them what your neighborhood used to be like.

What should happen next?

Who would the change help, and how? For instance, if you’re aiming to improve people’s health, how is their health now? How could it be better? Sometimes data already exist; other times, you might need to collect the data yourself.

- Information that’s already out there. Data can be complicated, so you might want to ask your school nurse, wellness counselor, or someone else who’s good at research to help look at data related to the issue you’re considering. Federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as universities and other institutions, may all have data that could be useful to you.
- Here are some examples of data sources that can help you learn more about health issues in your community—and help you make your case.
 1. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps compare counties within each state on more than 30 factors that influence how well and how long we live, including education, jobs and housing. www.countyhealthrankings.org
 2. Advancement Project’s Healthy City initiative provides a web-based tool that enables you to create maps and charts to analyze community health and city needs. www.healthycity.org
 3. National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership hosts a variety of research and data from cities across the nation. It focuses on topics that influence the development and use of neighborhoods. www.neighborhoodindicators.org
 4. Diversitydatakids.org provides a set of data and policy analysis about child well-being compiled from a variety of sources. It hosts a web-based tool that allows you to rank data and visualize it geographically. You can also create customized profiles for specific locations. www.diversitydatakids.org
 5. Kidsdata.org provides data about the health and well-being of children in communities across California. Data can be searched by topic, region, or demographic. www.kidsdata.org
 6. Community Commons has many different types of data on health at the community level that you can explore. www.communitycommons.org

WHEN POLICY GOES WRONG

One thing you might notice in these conversations is that it might seem like a lot of problems were caused by unjust policies. For example, many historically black neighborhoods were destroyed when state and local governments decided to build freeways through them. The sad fact is that policy can be prejudiced, and it has been used to hurt people—but this doesn’t have to be the case. Policy is a powerful tool—when it’s used for the public good, it can help instead of harm. That’s where you come in.

Information you collect. Sometimes you might have specific questions about your school or your neighborhood that aren't answered by a city-wide or state-wide health survey. When that happens, you can collect your own data. Community assessments, like focus groups, surveys, or public meetings, are all different tools you can use to gather the information you want from your community. The EPA's [Public Participation Guide](#) has more about these and other methods of gathering input from the community. [Community Tool Box](#) is another good resource for this.

1. A survey is a set of questions you ask a group of people to find out their opinion about or experience with something you're interested in. If the input you want can be summed up in a few straightforward questions, a survey could be the perfect tool. You can do surveys in person or online, using tools like [SurveyMonkey](#) or [Google Forms](#).
2. Audits are like surveys, but you're surveying an environment instead of a group of people. You won't literally be asking the sidewalk a question! It's more like you're observing a space—a busy intersection, a park, or a corner store, for example—and using a pre-set list of questions to assess how safe or health-promoting it is. See the exercise below for more on audits.
3. A focus group is a small group of people that you ask a set of prepared questions to. Focus groups are good when you want to get an in-depth look at people's thoughts or opinions about something.
4. A public meeting is a gathering of a broad array of people for a specific purpose. Public meetings are good if you want to share information with a large group of people and then get their feedback on it.

EXERCISE: WALK/BIKE/HEALTHY FOOD AUDITS

A walk audit is an assessment of what it's like to walk in a particular area that's suspected of being dangerous or difficult to walk in. Walk audits highlight problems in existing infrastructure, like high traffic speeds, broken sidewalks, and missing crosswalks. You could use the results of the walk audit to back up your request for improvements. Other people have adapted this process for bicycling safely and finding healthy food to illuminate the places where it's hard to do those things and recommend changes. If you're interested in something like this, be sure to go with a partner or a group, especially if you're in an unfamiliar area.

Additional resources:

- [Safe Routes to School Walkability Assessment Checklist](#)
- [MAPS-Mini survey and protocol at Active Living Research](#)
- [How to improve walking routes in your community \(video\)](#)
- [Bikeability checklist from the U.S. Department of Transportation](#)
- [Healthy Food Retail Assessment Guide from CDC](#)



Community case study: Youth-led Community Assessment

People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER) is a grassroots organization in San Francisco that organizes around environmental and economic justice issues, such as air quality, parks and recreation spaces, and affordable housing. As a part of developing a community-driven vision of urban agriculture in underserved San Francisco neighborhoods, PODER wanted to determine whether residents would support and participate in a local urban agriculture project.



Youth employees at PODER led the community engagement efforts. These youth collected more than 290 surveys, conducted focus groups at schools, and interviewed elders in the community.

When the youth looked at the results of the surveys, they saw some key themes emerge, including:

- ✦ More than a quarter of neighborhood residents live in overcrowded housing.
- ✦ People surveyed wanted more publicly accessible recreation space.
- ✦ Residents had lots of ideas about how to use the space, including cultural food celebrations, composting, exercise, and socializing with neighbors.

One of PODER's youth employees shared this story: "While door-knocking to survey neighbors around Crocker Amazon Park, we met a man who planted an olive tree when his father passed. He told us that where he's from, olive trees are symbols of peace, because it takes 20 years for an olive tree to bear fruit. If a tree bore fruit, it signified 20 years of peace because groves of olive trees were burnt in times of conflict. I loved learning about how our community stories are connected to growing food in our neighborhood."

The youth employees were able to use the information and stories they gathered in the survey to help them make their case for turning the vacant plot of land into a community garden.

Resource with tips on creating and conducting a survey can be found in the [Community Needs Assessment Survey Guide](#) from the Utah State University Extension.

Every problem has a history—usually a long one. It's important to understand how problems are connected to policies (aka rules) and practices in the community, which in turn are often rooted in systematic injustices.

Get at the causes of the problems you see

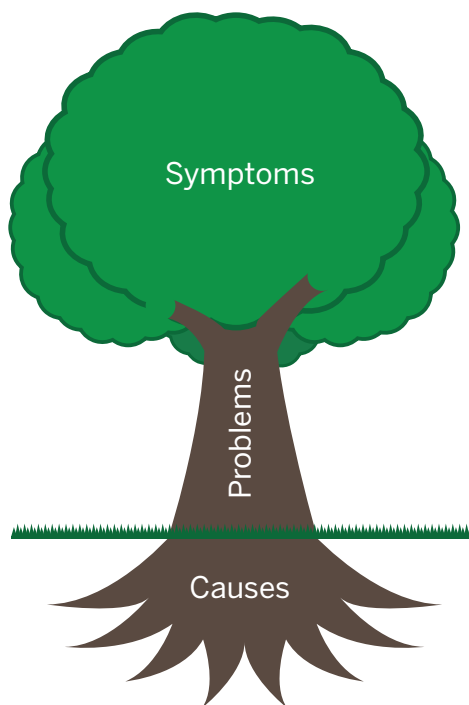
The issues in your community didn't spring up out of nowhere. One way to start to figure out how things are connected is to ask a simple question, "Why?" For each problem you identify, ask why it exists. Then, take the reason you identified and ask again: "Why?" Do this four or five times until you get to something that seems like a root cause—one of the big things that causes pain in our society, like poverty or discrimination.

EXERCISE: ROOT CAUSE TREE

This exercise is a way to visualize the causes of the problems you see as you start to figure things out.

- Leaves: What are the problems you see in your community? Describe the symptoms.
- Trunk: What are the policies or practices that cause those problems?
- Roots: What are the underlying causes of those policies and practices you identified in the trunk? Why do the policies exist? Think about context here: historical, racial, and socio-economic.

Understanding Root Causes



Symptoms

- Result or outcome of the problem
- What you see as a problem (Obvious)

Achy, weak, tired

The Problem

- Gap from goal or standard

Fever

Causes

- “The Roots” — system below the surface, bringing about the problem (Not Obvious)

Infection

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When you do this, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed. How are you and a group of friends supposed to end racism? Or poverty? But don’t give up. Flip the script and use the root cause you identified as a source of inspiration: “By fighting for [policy], I am helping to end an injustice caused by [root cause].” Let this exercise be motivating rather than overwhelming.

Get Down to Details

Build your Strategy

Now you're at an important point in the advocacy process—you're moving from research and planning to taking action. You want your advocacy actions to be thoughtful and organized. To keep your team on the same page, start by asking the 5 W questions:

- ✦ What?
- ✦ Where?
- ✦ Who?
- ✦ When?
- ✦ Why?

WHAT do you want?

Addressing the root causes of problem you identified

- ✦ First, you have to decide, based on the listening and learning you did and the problem you decided to address, what you want to do.
- ✦ Ideally, the issue you choose to work on should be:
 - Something you think you and your team can do effectively. This is for you and your team to figure out. Try to balance being realistic with challenging yourselves.
 - Something you're interested in.
 - Something people in your community recognize is a problem.
 - Maybe even something that people in your community are already working to change.

If you look back at your root cause tree, you may already realize that you don't have the resources to go all the way to the roots. But even if you can't directly address a root cause like poverty or racism in your neighborhood, you don't want to get stuck just picking at the leaves, either. Look for a place in the middle, where you can do more than react to the symptoms of a problem, but where you won't get too bogged down in the complexity of big, systemic injustices.

This part is important—it's the main thing your coalition will be working toward, what you'll be asking the people in power to do something about. This is also known as your demand. Your demand should be:

- ✦ A clear, quick, specific description of what you want
- ✦ Something you could actually achieve
- ✦ Something your target, the person you'll make your demand to, has the power to do something about (see the WHO section later in this chapter)

Try out the activity on the following page to craft a strong demand.

Tell me what you want!

Not sure if your demand is on point? Here are some examples. Some are clear and specific, while others are vague, and a couple are in between. Can you pick out the strong demands?

1. We demand that our schools be better.
2. We demand that the school district stop cuts to our school's music program.
3. We demand that the police department suspend alcohol licenses for liquor stores that are selling alcohol to minors.
4. We demand that the city do something about youth violence.
5. We demand fewer sugary drink ads in our city.
6. We demand that the school district create a restorative justice program that has been proven to reduce dropout rates of students of color.
7. We demand that all youth in our city get free passes to ride city buses.
8. We demand that the property owner remove the alcohol billboard across the street from our school.
9. We demand that the city do something about the fact that most kids who are dropping out of school are Latino and African American.

Answers:

Weak: 1, 4, 5, 9

In between: 2, 7

Strong: 3, 6, 8

After you decide which demands are strong, pick one you think is really good and tell your teammates what you liked about it. Talk about reasons—it's important to be clear and specific in making your demand. How about the weak ones—what would make them better? What's missing from the ones that are in between? After you've thought about this, start to brainstorm what your demand might look like.

Once you have a draft of your demand, ask yourself if it's SMART:

- ✦ **Specific** - Does it clearly state what you want and how you want it to happen?
- ✦ **Measurable** - Do you have a way of knowing whether you succeeded?
- ✦ **Achievable** - Is it challenging but realistic?
- ✦ **Relevant** - Does it contribute to your vision for a better community?
- ✦ **Time-bound** - Does it include a date for when you want to achieve it? (See the WHEN section for more on timing.)



WHERE do you want it to happen?

If you did a good job while you were listening and learning from the community, you probably already have a pretty good sense of your WHERE, which refers to the place that will be affected by the change you're trying to create with your demand. There are different kinds of decisionmakers and government agencies that make policies for the place they are responsible for. So, even if you can't name the person in charge of everything you see off the top of your head, you understand that there's a person or group of people who are in charge at your school, and those people are different from the ones who are in charge of, say, a park in your neighborhood.

Your needs assessment probably gave you an idea of who currently has the greatest needs and where they are located. When you identify your WHERE, do it in a way that's as inclusive as possible. For example, if you did a survey and found that the water fountains were broken in multiple schools in your area, you would want your WHERE to be broader than just your school—you'd want to broaden it to include those other schools, or maybe the whole school district. In general, the bigger your WHERE, the longer it takes. Choose a WHERE that includes the people who you know need your help.

WHO has the power to meet, advance, or hinder your demands?

Your WHERE will also give you clues as to how you will answer your next question: WHO? Your target is the person (or group of people) to whom you will make your demand. This should be someone who has decision making power over the issue you're pursuing. Different policy goals have different decisionmakers, including people who are not government officials (such as business owners or other people). If your demand is related to your school, for example, then your target might be the principal, the superintendent, or the school board. Here are some ideas about who tends to be in charge of what. These titles and responsibilities vary from place to place, but you can use this as a place to start.

Tip: To find contact information, search for your target's title + your location. (Example: "Zoning board [your city]")

Sample Issues	Check Out...
Healthier food in schools	Principal, superintendent, parent-teacher association or organization (PTA or PTO), school board
Local businesses funding an annual neighborhood block party to promote community safety	Chamber of commerce, local trade associations
More healthy food stores in the neighborhood	Zoning board, planning commission, city council
Tobacco litter in parks	Department of public works, environmental health, parks and recreation, city council
More bike lanes	Department of transportation, city council

Local government: How do you know who speaks for you?

Whether they call themselves a council member, a supervisor, a commissioner, or something else, if you want to know who represents you in your local government, try searching “Who represents me [city name] local government” online.

For more on this topic, check out [Forms of Local Government](#) from the National League of Cities.

You may have to ask people you trust or do some searching on the internet to find who the decisionmaker is you should target to make your policy goal happen.

In addition, some issues have multiple potential targets.

Say, for example, your demand has something to do with an issue going before the city council or board of supervisors, and there are 11 council members. How do you decide which one of them is your target? There are several ways to think about it:

- ▶ The council member who represents you or your coalition, especially if you already have a relationship with them.
- ▶ The leader of a relevant committee or subcommittee that’s responsible for policies related to your issue. For example, many city governments have committees for health, education, and transportation, among others. Some also have subcommittees within those committees to address more specific issues.
- ▶ A decisionmaker who you know agrees with the demands you will make, and is therefore more likely to use their power to become a champion for your cause.
- ▶ If your demand is related to something pending before the council, the council member who introduced the bill or resolution. To find out who that is, search for articles about the bill in the news. If you know the bill number, you might be able to search for it on your city government’s website. When in doubt, ask an adult you trust if they can help.

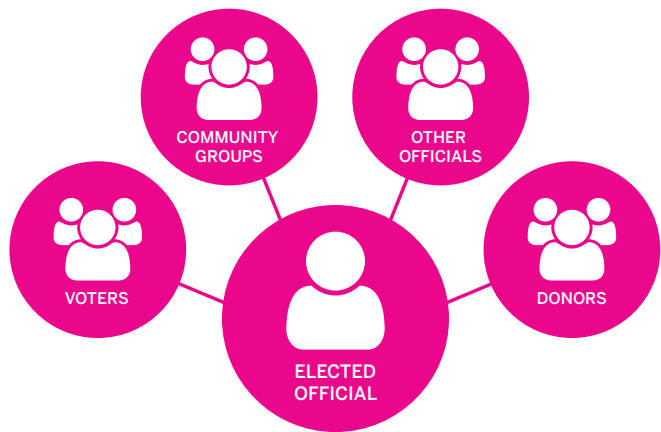
You might also find that there are things happening at the state or federal (national) level that could affect what’s happening in your neighborhood.

Does your goal involve a policy that affects...

- ▶ the entire state? Then, your main decisionmakers may be state assembly or senate members. You can find out who represents your neighborhood by searching online for “find my legislator in [your state].”
- ▶ the entire country? Then, your main decisionmakers may be your members of Congress—those are U.S. senators and representatives. Their contact info can be found at www.govtrack.us/congress/members. If you’re interested in a particular bill, you can search for it on congress.gov.

You can also consider who influences your target, and how you can influence those people to help convince your target to support the policy change you want.

When you’re thinking about who has power, you might also want to take a step back and think about what it means to have power.



Information from: [Advocates for Youth](#)

EXERCISE

Defining power

Activity adapted from Youth Leadership Institute

As people are sitting down, hand them each colored paper, a piece of tape, and a marker. Ask participants to think about people they know in real life, or fictional characters who have a lot of power and write down their names in CAPITAL LETTERS on the colored paper. If participants ask for clarity, tell them they need to decide what you mean by power and who has a lot of it. You can also give an example of someone who's powerful.

Then, explain to the group: Without showing the name to anyone, gather in a circle and find someone you don't know too well. Introduce yourself and then tape your name to their back and ask them to do the same. You can ask only one question, and your partner can only say yes or no. Keep asking people in the group until you figure out who is on your back.

To debrief the activity, ask questions like:

- ✦ Can someone explain whom they picked, and why you think they have a lot of power? (Ask a few individuals this question.)
- ✦ Were there real differences in the kinds of people we think have a lot of power?

Transition into definitions by saying: We've thought a lot about who some powerful people are—now let's get to the heart of it by considering what power is.

Definitions of power: Ask people to shout out words or phrases that come to mind with the word power. Chart these on flip-chart paper as they are shared out. Ask someone to give a definition of power using some of these terms. Write out what they have, then provide a formal definition. As you share the definition, be sure to say that there are many different definitions. One we can also consider is the following:

- ✦ **Power** is the ability to change or control the circumstances or conditions you're living in.

There are also different kinds of power. Two of them that are important when you're advocating for policy change are the following:

- ✦ **Institutional power:** the way society is set up—power in the hands of a few people who make decisions that affect all people
- ✦ **People power:** the power we all have as everyday people to collectively make change

Another WHO question you should consider: Who else cares about the issue that I care about? Consider the people outside your group who might support or oppose you in your efforts to create change.

Start with your allies. Allies are people who support your cause and would be willing to help advocate for change. There is strength in numbers, and that strength is even more powerful when you create a strong team with a common goal. When identifying your allies, try to think of people with institutional power, such as politicians, city council members, mayors, or other influential people whom you might be able to bring onto your team. Additionally, consider connecting with individuals or groups that represent the citizens most affected by the issue. These folks could be elected officials, staff members at a trusted local organization, or another type of community leader. Try to identify the people who are directly and indirectly affected by the

issue. Be sure to include individuals who represent different social classes, genders, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, ages, religions, or cultures.

There are also people who oppose you—who either don't want things to change or who want a different kind of change to happen. These are your opponents. Identifying your opponents is trickier than making a list of your allies. You know your allies—you see them at meetings and events. You probably don't know your opponents like that. Opponents do not support your cause and may try to get in your way. That's why it's important to figure out who they are, and to be as specific as possible. When thinking about your opponents on this issue, start by asking yourself: Who benefits from the way things are now? What reasons do you think they might have for being opposed to your demands?

EXERCISE

Power mapping

Activity adapted from Youth Leadership Institute

This exercise puts together the thinking you've done about power and the thinking you've done about your allies and opponents.

Make a list of your primary allies and opponents by asking people to call out any individuals or organizations they think of that might take a stand either for or against your demands. Write each individual or organization on a separate sticky note.

Then, use a piece of chart paper to draw a graph with power on the Y axis (more power is up, less power is down) and stance on the X axis (with die-hard allies on the left, mortal enemies on the right, and neutral parties in the middle).

Go around the room and ask each person to put one of the allies or opponents on the graph somewhere based on how powerful they are and how much they agree or disagree with you. After all the allies and opponents are on the map, give the group a minute to take it in. Ask if anyone has any major objections to where allies or opponents are placed.

Once everyone is generally in agreement on what the map looks like, use the following questions to guide a discussion about how the results of the power mapping exercise might apply to your work:

- Who seems more powerful—your allies or your opponents?
- How is your relationship with your strongest ally? What could you do to improve it?
- Who seems to have more people on their side? If you feel like you need more allies, go back to the root cause tree to get ideas. Who else cares about the problems caused by the roots? Could you convince them to join your side by showing them how your struggles are connected? There's a saying in organizing: "Make the 'we' big enough to win." You need to get enough people on your side to be strong enough to convince the decisionmaker to meet your demand.
- Look at your potential challengers. For the people who might be closer to the middle: Can you bring them to your side?
- For the opponents who can't be converted and will actively work against you: How will you anticipate and counter what they will say against you, your coalition, and your allies?



What about people who disagree with you?

As you're thinking about building your team, and later, when you're figuring out who your allies are, it's important to think about how you'll engage with people who disagree with you. A lot of people are resistant to change because they think they're better off keeping things the way they are. For some people this is true (and you won't be able to change their minds) but other people can be persuaded to see things your way. They might even join you!

The Center for Social Inclusion suggests a three-step process called the ACT framework for talking about your issue in a way that can bring people onto your side:

Affirm: Speak to a value that they share with you and your cause.

"I know you like getting chips from the corner store after school. I'm always hungry in the afternoon, so having a snack is key."

Counter: Connect that value to an explanation of what caused the problem you want to solve.

"But when you look around our neighborhood, it seems like all you see are corner stores like this one that sell junk food and alcohol."

Transform: Appeal to their emotions as you show them how they can be part of the solution.

"I don't want to take your chips away—I just want our neighbors to have some healthier options. I want us to have a chance to be healthy. Will you help me bring a grocery store to the neighborhood?"

Learn more about this framework at the [Center for Social Inclusion's website](#).

WHEN do you want it?

Ideally, you want your demands met yesterday. But the reality is that it can take a long time to change policy. It takes time: from getting your target, to bringing up your issue, to having decisionmakers debate it, to having them to vote on it. If it's a big issue, there may also be a period when the public gets to comment on it. And if it's something that will cost your school or city money, you'll have to take the budget into account—if there's no more money this year, you may have to wait until the next year.

When you're thinking about WHEN, it's a good idea to zoom out and take in the big picture. Working with your team to create a timeline can help you be realistic about when you might achieve your goals and how to keep the pressure on your target over the long term.

WHY do you want it?

You already know this one—it's the problem in your community that started you on the path toward advocacy in the first place. You'll use it to support your demand in all of your advocacy work, and especially when you're making your case to your target. In other words, your WHY is the reason for your demand from the WHAT section. Make clear links between your demand and the most important parts of the information you gathered during the "Listen and learn" step.

Here are some things to consider when you're thinking about how to support your argument.

- ✦ What is your personal connection to what you're advocating? How does it affect your family, your friends, or your neighborhood?
- ✦ What was the most compelling story you heard when you were collecting data from the community? If you want to share someone else's story, make sure you get their permission or share it in a way that other people won't know it's them.
- ✦ Did you uncover any statistics that might be surprising or shocking?
- ✦ Describe in your own words the relationship between your statistics and your demand.
- ✦ Think about whose mind you might need to change. Maybe go back to your power map and look at your opponents: What information or stories could help convince them?

You will refine the way you present your demand and argue in its favor over time depending on the venue, the audience, and the medium. We'll get into those kinds of details in the next section.

ACTIVITY: ISSUE TIMELINE

- Draw a long horizontal line on a big piece of paper or a chalkboard. Make 10 ticks along the line to represent the past 10 years.
- Go back to your research on what's been done before on this issue to help you fill in the major milestones.
- If there's been a lot happening on your issue recently, you may want to make a separate timeline for just the past year or two.
- Finally, draw another long line and start to sketch out what might happen over the next few months or a year. What actions are already planned? What events will be going on in the world that you might be able to use to your advantage in advancing your policy goal? What might happen after a policy you support is passed? What might happen if it fails?

The “HOW”

Pick Your Tactics

After you’ve answered WHAT, WHO, WHERE, WHEN, and WHY in defining your strategy, all that’s left is deciding on your tactics: the HOW. There are many ways to go about winning your demand.

When it comes to tactics, one thing you might hear people say is, “You do what you can with what you have.” A good first step toward deciding on a tactic is figuring out what resources you have available to you. A lot of the time, when people say “resources,” they mean money. But you don’t have to have a lot of money to plan and follow through on an effective tactic. Brainstorm with your team about what else you have. Your car, your adult allies, your friends, and your artistic talent are all potential resources.

Another thing you could consider is what would be the best tactic for your target. For example, is your target supportive of your demands, or are they more likely to be opposed to what you want? An in-person meeting with a target who is generally supportive of your demands will be a lot different from one where your target is opposed.

Once you have a sense of what you’re working with, two other important factors to think about are TIME and RISK. Some actions take only a few minutes—you can do them right now! Other actions might take a little while to think about, and some require more time to plan. Different actions also involve varying amounts of risk. Depending on the tactic you choose, you could run the risk of feeling embarrassed, of upsetting someone, or of physical harm (think: going up to a house by yourself to canvass and finding a mean dog ready to bite you!). With training and preparation, there are lots of ways to do tactics that are slightly higher risk, like canvassing or protesting, in safe and effective ways.

There’s a lot to consider when you’re choosing a tactic. Plus you want to have fun with it! It’s okay to just pick one and try it. Even if it doesn’t work as well as you hoped, you’ll learn from it and you might be able to build on it later. Get out there and exercise your First Amendment rights!

The chart on the following page has examples of tactics plotted on a graph with TIME on one axis and RISK on another. We’ll discuss each one of these tactics in depth later in this chapter. You can use this chart to choose one that seems like it fits the time you have and the risk you’re willing to take on.



Choose a Tactic Based on Time and Risk

High Risk		Do door-to-door canvassing	Plan and lead a protest or demonstration
Medium Risk	Post to social media about your issue, tag your target in your post	Attend a protest or demonstration Speak with the press Share your writing publicly (e.g., writing an op-ed or blog) Go to or speak at a town hall Testify in front of government officials about your issue	Lead, and get others to join, your own campaign Plan a conference, workshop, or class to educate others about your issue Create a website, radio segment, play, or film on your issue
Low Risk	Try out resources like 5 Calls, change.org, or Resistbot Email, write or call your target Collect ideas for creating art or writing about your issue Talk to someone you know about your cause Boycott products Donate Sign a petition Learn about an issue Get friends and family to vote	Register people to vote Phone bank to get others to vote or support your cause Meet with your target Discuss a book, article or film related to your cause with people you know Make a flier or poster for your cause Vote Attend a candlelight vigil for your cause Create art or writing about your cause Fundraise for your cause Volunteer	Join, or take a leadership position in an organization or local government Do research relating to your issue
	5 Minutes	A Few Hours	A Day

Tactics that take a few minutes

If your target is an elected official, and there's some kind of movement on your issue—like it's in the news—then you're in luck. You can tell them how you feel right now using your cell phone! Elected officials are the voice of the people, so sharing our opinions with them is part of our civic duty. They have their own opinions and beliefs, but if a lot of people contact them and ask them to vote a certain way or propose a certain policy, they might listen.

Call your target. Believe it or not, calling is also usually the fastest way to share your opinion! And, at least for elected officials, most people agree that it's the best way to make your case. It takes only a couple of minutes, and then it's done. You can usually find your target's phone number by plugging their name into a search engine online. When you call, the official's assistant, usually called an aide, will probably answer. It's their job to write down the issue you're calling about and what your opinion is. You don't have to give an Oscar-worthy performance. It's okay if you stumble over your words. It's the aide's job to listen to you—they aren't going to argue with you or challenge you. Be brief, make your point, thank them politely, and hang up. Job well done! The only thing they might ask is where you live.

Write to your target on- or off-line. If you can't call, or you really don't want to, you can snail mail, email, or tweet your target instead. Keep it simple and think about how you can grab their attention with your message. For example, if you decide to send a postcard, you could write what you want on one side and draw a picture that represents some part of your demand on the other side.

Register to vote. Voting is a great place to start. It isn't the only way to change policy. Some people can't vote but find other ways to be effective advocates. But voting is really important. If your elected officials don't listen to you, or you don't like what they do, you and your allies can use your votes to bring in someone better. But only if you all are registered.

If you're over 18: You're old enough to vote! Each state has a different voter registration process. In most states, you can register online. If you are 16 or 17, you may be able to pre-register so your voter registration will be ready to go on your 18th birthday! To get registered, check out your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) or this site, <http://vote.gov/>.

If you're under 18: There's plenty for you to do while you wait for your chance to cast your first ballot. You can:

- Encourage your adult allies to vote
- Show your friends and family how to register
- Volunteer with organizations like Rock the Vote, American Legion, OurTime, Voto Latino, Project Vote, or NAACP to help register others to vote
- Volunteer for a political campaign by searching online for: "volunteer for [candidate's name] campaign"

WHAT DO I SAY WHEN I CALL?

Here's a sample phone script you can fill in with the relevant details:

"Hi! My name is [Name]. I am a resident of [City], [ZIP Code]. I am calling to ask that [Decisionmaker Name] do [action], because [reason]."

They need your ZIP code to make sure you're a constituent—in other words, that you live in their district or state. Your REASON can be a great data point or a quick story about how the decisionmaker's action will affect you. And remember: Keep it simple, smile, and breathe.

FLYING SOLO?

If you want to promote your cause but you don't have a team yet, you still have options. If you contribute your voice to a national movement, you'll instantly be one of many. This is a great option if there's something you're passionate about, but you haven't found people in your area who are into the same thing. Policy change at the national level can feel big and slow (like, slow), but if you're feeling alone, it can be really motivating to feel connected to a larger movement for a cause you care about.

New tools make it easier than ever to contact your senators and representative. Try out resources like [WholsMyRepresentative](#), [5 Calls](#), or [Resistbot](#) for quick, easy ways to connect with your elected officials on issues you care about as they play out at the national level.

Bonus: These are all actions you can take right now, without a lot of money or other resources. Get to it!

Tactics that take a few hours

1. Write a letter to a decisionmaker

2. Write an op-ed or a letter to the editor

If you like to write, there are some fun and effective ways you can use your talents to promote your cause. Handwritten messages to elected officials can carry a lot of weight, because they know you must care a lot if you went to the trouble of writing something down, finding a stamp, and going to the mailbox! Feel free to get creative by including a drawing or a poem in your letter. You can also write your message on a postcard if you want to keep it short and sweet.

Ready to share your thoughts with a broader audience? You can pitch an opinion article, sometimes called an op-ed, to your local newspaper or to a blog that you like. Keep it brief and engaging. Tell a story about how this issue affects you and your neighbors, then say what you want to do about it. If your issue is in the news already, you can write a letter to the editor in response to their article that includes your key talking points.

3. Share your message through signs or fliers.

Making signs can help let more people know about your issue and bring more people over to your side. Even though people spend a lot of time online, they still exist in the real world, too! Particularly for issues that are very local, like something you want to change in a school or on your block, it's easy to put up fliers. A lot of the people who will be affected by the change you seek will be the ones who see the signs or fliers the most often—because they live there or spend a lot of time there, just like you.

If you're feeling creative, you can create artwork, radio segments, or even a film about your cause. You could

WHAT IS LOBBYING, AND HOW CAN IT LIMIT WHAT YOU CAN DO?

Lobbying is any activity you do or material you create to try to pass a specific policy or influence decisionmakers to vote one way or another. If your group is supported by a nonprofit organization, there might be limits to how much lobbying work you can do. But most of what's in this guide – like gathering information about what your community needs, educating people about your issue, and sharing ideas about how to improve your community – isn't considered lobbying.

also do some chalking. Chalking means writing messages on the ground with chalk. People often do this to advertise events or demonstrations, but it can also be a fun and creative way to get key points about your issue out to a broader audience. Be aware: Sometimes you need to get permission to chalk.

4. Canvass your community.

Canvassing means talking directly to the community about the issue you care about. Depending on your WHERE, this could be in your school, on your block, or in a broader area of your city or town. You can canvass on the phone or in person.

A youth advocate in Fresno describes their experiences with canvassing:

“I went canvassing for [Prop 57]...the proposition basically [frees] people who ... went to federal prison for non-violent crimes. And I went canvassing for Californians for Justice. And they had me go out and just walk door to door with a partner, asking if people would like to vote on this proposition, and explaining it to them, and how it'd affect the lives of the people who would be freed, or how it'd affect their families and the community as well.”

Canvassing can be tough because you have to be ready to have a conversation and defend your position at the same time. It can be a great way to get outside of your comfort zone and push yourself to be a better advocate. On the other hand, if your canvassing takes you to places and people you don't know, it can be dangerous. Always canvass in groups of two or three.

Canvassing is a conversation, so it doesn't follow a script. Here are some general tips to keep in mind:

- **Introduce yourself.** Give your first name and your organization and tell them if you live in the same area—this will show you have something in common.
- **Tell them why you're there.** Share your cause and a key reason why it's important to you.
- **Ask them what they think.** Listen carefully, especially if they seem to disagree. See if you can use the ACT framework we shared in the WHO section earlier.
- **Let them know how to learn more.** Share a flier, pamphlet, or business card if you have one so they can learn more about your issue if they're interested. If they're supportive, you could ask them to put up a sign in their window, vote in favor of your issue, come to an upcoming meeting, or even join your team if they seem really excited.

WHAT ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA?

It's true that posts and likes alone won't get you to your policy goal, which is why this guide focuses on tactics that you do offline. But you've probably already figured out that there are lots of ways to use social media to support your tactics. Here are some examples:

- Creating an event page for a forum or demonstration you're planning and encouraging friends to come or to share the page
- Building relationships with groups that care about similar issues
- Sharing the key points of your strategy with a broader audience to gain more support
- Livestreaming your events, particularly if there's a big crowd, to show your “people power”
- Encouraging or thanking your target for doing the right thing, or calling them out when they don't take action

Tactics that take a day or more

1. Host an open mic, a community forum, or a town hall.

Sometimes you want to bring people together to teach them more about your issue before you start to really work on a particular policy. Or maybe you want to get a lot of local groups together and start to unite them behind one issue. Getting people together and allowing them to speak freely on a topic and learn from each other can spark interest in—and action on—your issue.

At an open mic, people take turns sharing their thoughts through speaking, poetry, songs, dancing, or another medium. An open mic can have a theme, so your open mic would be themed around the issue you care about. A community forum is more of a dialogue—people would come to talk, ask questions, and debate with each other about a particular topic. If you have a good relationship with an elected official who cares about your issue, you could host a town hall meeting. At a town hall, community residents take turns asking an elected official questions about an issue.

To set the stage at any of these events, someone from your team could talk at the beginning or end of the open mic to give people more information about the issue. You can advertise your open mic, forum, or town hall online or with fliers around your neighborhood so more people will come.

2. Get a meeting

Find your angle: Your first step should be to see if anyone on your team has worked with or contacted the target before. People are more likely to respond to someone they know. If someone has a connection, ask them to introduce you. You could also try partnering with a larger, related organization that has a relationship with your target. Even if you don't have a connection, you can still reach out and try to meet with them.

Call their office: Find their number on your city or county website. You will most likely talk to an assistant to the elected official, also known as an aide. Tell them briefly the topic you want to talk about and schedule a time that is convenient for you to meet. If your target is an elected official, and you're a constituent (meaning they represent you), you can mention that. Most officials prefer to meet at their office on weekdays between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Ask for a meeting and ask when and where the meeting will take place. Get the name, phone, and email of the aide who scheduled the meeting and send them a confirmation email stating: "Thanks for scheduling a meeting with the Youth Commission at 4:00 p.m. on May 31st at City Hall. You can contact me at..."

Decide who to go with: It's a good idea to bring a buddy with you to the meeting, especially if this is your first time sitting down to talk with an elected official. It'll help you keep your cool knowing there's someone on your side, and you can help each other remember the important points you want to make.

Preparing for the meeting. Meet with your group beforehand to prepare an agenda. Be familiar with the basics of the issue you will be discussing. Look up the official's recent activities in case anything relates to the issue you're going to talk about. If you don't know what the official looks like, search online for a photo.

Work with your group to create a list of the main points you want to cover. These are your talking points. Go back to the WHY section if you need inspiration for this. Be sure to include a story about how you or your allies are personally affected by your issue.



Write an agenda for the meeting and send it to the aide. The agenda gives the official an idea of what you want to discuss. Your agenda should include the following:

- Introductions
- Meeting purpose (the issues you want to discuss)
- Time for questions
- Any new issues the official wants you to know about
- Discussion of next steps

Once you've created an agenda to share with the official, you can make a filled-in version that has notes for you and your team about who's saying what. These are your meeting notes. Your meeting notes might look something like this:

MEETING NOTES

- Introductions: Say who you are (name, age, group, why you are involved).
- Open with a compliment: Highlight any positive actions they have taken or supportive comments they have made about the issues you care about.
- Meeting purpose: Explain what the meeting is about, what you are here for today, the issues you want to discuss.
- Identify the problem.
- Tell a story about how this affects you or people you know personally.
- Cite statistics and facts about your issue.
- Outline what you've done or accomplished so far.
- Explain what you are working toward—your vision for how your community could be better.
- Ask what you want from the decisionmaker.
- Ask for their commitment.
- Ask what else they could do to take action on your issue and who else they think you should talk to who might support your issue.
- Time for questions: Ask the official if they have any questions.
- Any new issues the official wants you to know about.
- Next steps: Briefly recap the meeting and review any specific next steps that have come from the meeting or any specific things the elected official promised to do.
- Thank them for their time: When the meeting is over, shake their hand, ask for the aide and elected official's business card, and give them your business card (if you have one). Don't forget to thank them!

You can also assign your roles more generally:

- ✦ **Facilitator:** This person starts off the meeting and sets the agenda.
- ✦ **Spokespeople:** Divide up your agenda so that each person speaks about a topic.
- ✦ **Note taker:** One person can take notes for future reference.

Write a one-page summary to give to your elected official when you leave. This summary should reiterate the points you plan to make in the meeting, so it can roughly track the agenda. Include information about:

- ✦ What the problem or issue is
- ✦ Key statistics or facts about the issue
- ✦ What is currently being done about it
- ✦ What you want them to do about it now

Tips for a successful meeting:

- ✦ **Be courteous and on time:** When the official or aide enters the room, stand up, shake hands, and introduce yourself. It is okay to let them know if you have a different opinion. Remain polite throughout the meeting even if you disagree on an issue.
- ✦ **Take charge of the meeting:** Politicians love to talk and bring up their issues other than yours. If you feel they are trying to steer you off track by talking about too many other issues, politely return to your main idea, “While that’s an important issue, what we really want to talk to you about today is”
- ✦ **Make your requests clear and specific:** Go into the meeting with one or two specific things you want the elected official to do related to your demands. In addition to your specific requests, make sure to ask the elected official what else they could do to take action on your issue. Also ask them who else they think you should talk to, and who else might support your issue.
- ✦ **Don’t let them squirm away or pass the buck:** Don’t let them avoid your questions with vague answers or things like “sure I’ll support that” or “of course I support the youth.” Ask them specifically how they will support you. You might have to ask several times for what you want and don’t stop asking until you get an answer. If they say that they are not the one responsible for something make sure to ask them who is responsible and ask for their phone number and email. Better yet, ask the elected official if they or their staff would contact that person on your behalf and put you in touch.

After the meeting

Follow up: Write them a thank you note to express your appreciation and briefly restate the issues discussed and actions you want them take. Offer to help them address your issue in the future, and provide them with any information that they requested during your meeting. If the elected official agreed to do anything, call and email the aide regularly to follow up and make sure they do it!

Report back

At your next meeting with your group, report back on how the meeting went and ask people what they think the next steps should be for this target.

3. Give testimony.

When there are changes planned in a community, especially big ones, elected officials will usually hold public hearings or town halls. These are meetings where people from the community come to offer feedback on the proposed changes. At these meetings, people can voice their recommendations or concerns directly to city officials. This is called public testimony.

To find out when hearings are taking place on the issue you are interested in, you can search “public testimony + [your city or town]” or call or email your representative.

Because public testimony is often kept brief (usually about 1 to 5 minutes), it is helpful to outline talking points to guide your testimony. Focus on stating facts and data that support your argument. A personal story can also help illustrate how important an issue is to you. When giving public testimony, it is also important to bring written copies of your oral testimony. You should bring enough copies for each of the decisionmakers at the public hearing. Use the template on the next page to guide your testimony.

What do you do if you get nervous?

Lots of people get scared when they have to talk in front of an audience, whether they’re calling someone new on the phone, asking people for their vote, or speaking at a public meeting. Here are some tips from young people who’ve been there to help you feel more comfortable:

- ✦ Practice speaking up in lower-risk situations, like in class.
- ✦ Write down what you want to say, and practice, practice, practice it! You can say it in the mirror, videotape or voice record yourself saying it, practice saying it to family, friends, or other small groups of people, etc. Get feedback from these people to help improve your speech.
- ✦ Before and during your speech, you can also focus on breathing in a slow, deep (into your belly), and calming way.
- ✦ Choose a place to look in the audience that will make you feel less anxious. For example, you can look at the face of someone in the audience who seems friendly, look just above your audience’s head, or look at the blur of faces in the audience without focusing on anyone in particular.
- ✦ If you are speaking to an elected official who intimidates you, keep in mind that they might feel intimidated by you, too! Why? Because you can vote against them in the future, get others to vote against them, or create media attention that makes them look bad. They generally cannot do these things to you.
- ✦ In general, at least when talking with an elected official, you will not be quizzed on the details of an issue. They just want to learn about you and your story. If you do not know something, then just be honest about this and explain that you can try to find an answer and get back to them.
- ✦ Remember, it’s okay if your voice shakes.

Source: [Echo Through the Fog](#)

THANK YOU NOTE TEMPLATE

Dear [Target Name and Title],

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you. We know you are very busy, and we appreciate that you took the time to talk with us and share your concerns about an issue affecting young people.

As you recall, we talked about [issue].

- [Reiterate your main points.]
- [Include anything you said you would follow up with.]

We look forward to continuing to build our relationship over time. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to help you.

Sincerely,

[Name(s)]

[Organization]

If you’re working on getting comfortable with public speaking, but you just aren’t there yet, remember there are other ways you can engage in advocacy, like donating time or money to a cause, writing an email or letter, or creating art to promote your cause.

Talking Points Guide

Use the template below to guide your testimony.

<p>State the issue</p>	<p>The issue that I would like to speak about today is _____ _____ _____</p>
<p>What are the facts?</p>	<p>This issue is important to our community because: _____ • _____ • _____ • _____</p>
<p>How are you affected? Include a personal story if you have one</p>	<p>I am personally interested in fixing this issue because _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____</p>
<p>What should the city do about this?</p>	<p>In order to fix this problem, I ask that you _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____</p>
<p>How will this help?</p>	<p>This will help our community because _____ _____ _____ _____ _____</p>
<p>Thank you for your time and consideration</p>	

Letter to the Editor

Here is a sample letter to the editor format to help you organize your ideas. Remember, be creative, clear, opinionated, and succinct — keep it under 200 words.

Newspaper Name:

Newspaper address, fax or email:

Date:

Dear Editor:

Yesterday you reported that

This is [timely/interesting/ironic] because

As a [student/community member/youth advocate/young person/voter], my perspective is

What people don't realize is

One thing that could really make a difference is

Sincerely,

Signature

[Your name, address, email, and phone number]

4. Organize and/or attend a demonstration.

Demonstrations are a way for you to show your “people power” by coming together with your allies in a public place. Demonstrations show your target that there are a lot of people united behind a demand. When a lot of people show up to a demonstration, it shows that your cause has strength in numbers, which can be powerful. Building power helps you win your policy goal!

Marches or street protests probably come to mind when you think of a demonstration, but they can take many forms, including candlelight vigils, dance flash mobs, or die-ins.

If you’re planning a demonstration of your own, there are even more things you need to consider, like getting the necessary permits, promoting the event (so lots of people show up!), and interacting with the police. If your group wants to host a protest, but no one has done it before, try to find someone who’s more experienced to help you.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has more information about your rights and responsibilities at demonstrations.

The leader of the LA Trust shared a story about the young people from their youth advisory group attending the Women’s March in Los Angeles:

TIPS FOR STREET PROTESTS AND OTHER DEMONSTRATIONS:

- What to bring: Water, snacks, any medication you need, enough money to get home, emergency contact information, and a friend or a group of people you trust.
- Wear comfortable shoes and clothing that covers most of your skin.
- Avoid bringing anything that could be grabbed (jewelry, loose hair) or trap tear gas (oil-based lotion, contact lenses).
- Be prepared: Before you go, figure out how you’ll find your friends if you get separated, how you’ll get help if you need it, and what you would do if you were arrested. Consider bringing a pen and paper to document any incidents that occur.

For more info see the [ACLU](#)

“When the Women’s March in January 2017 happened on the same day as one of our meetings, a lot of the youth wanted to attend to stand in solidarity with people who felt threatened after the 2016 election. We talked about the march as an example of direct advocacy that they can do with other people. We made connections between the issues that were present at the march—reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, education—and the kinds of issues they will work on with us, as a health organization. And we had conversations about the purpose of a march beyond just a day of solidarity.

Afterward, they went back to our meeting space and had an exercise where they wrote a self-reflection, shared how they were feeling, and talked about why they made their signs. It was something that stayed with them. Later, they talked about changes to health care, and what was at stake. Participating in the march informed their understanding of the work they were doing. It contributed to the group dynamic, establishing collective identity and investment and supporting one another. It was a very powerful moment, and an empowering experience for them. You could sense a difference in the group before and after.”

Putting it all together

Make your own advocacy plan

Here's a table you can use to map out your plan to get the policy change you want for your community. Something to keep in mind—especially when you're planning for the long term—is how you might create a sequence of tactics that build on each other to put more and more pressure on your target. For more on tactic sequencing, check out [Advocates for Youth's Activist Toolkit](#).

1	Prepare yourself	>
2	Build your team	>
3	Choose your issue	>
4	Learn about your issue	>
5	Pick a policy demand	>
6	Choose a target	>
7	Identify allies & opponents	>
8	Actually do the tactic	>
9	Celebrate your wins	>
10	Do it again!	>

Celebrate your wins!

“I remember joining this group to feel like I had a purpose in my community. I was shy, I didn’t really have any experience in policy change, and I felt like such a small group wouldn’t reach up to the heights of more well-known advocacy groups. Four years later I am still here. I took a leadership position... I recruited and worked with my peers in making an annual event to work with the youth against substance abuse. I won a scholarship to be recognized in a more national level at Washington D.C. Now I noticed the change that I promoted, the leadership that I am achieving, and the positivity that I’m growing. This is all from the youth to the youth.” —Javier, 18

Achieving policy goals is hard, and it takes time. Make sure you take the time to celebrate every step you take toward making a positive change. Every meeting you have, every letter you write, every skill you build, and every new person you bring onto your team—these are all successes.

The work of policy advocacy is to build each of these small successes into something bigger. Something that changes your world for the better. Let’s get to work.



Additional resources

➤ **Berkeley Media Studies Group**

A treasure trove of materials and advice on how to develop strong messages with a public health approach that supports systems and policy change. See especially their media advocacy 101 section at www.bmsg.org/resources/media-advocacy-101.

➤ **Midwest Academy's Organizing for Social Change Manual for Activists**

This manual explores in greater depth critical resources to develop a campaign that can be used to change or influence policy. www.midwestacademy.com

➤ **CADCA Strategizer 31—Guidelines for Advocacy: Changing Policies and Laws to Create Safer Environments for Youth**

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America's (CADCA) strategizer helps clarify what constitutes “lobbying” activities for nonprofit organizations and to what extent these organizations can participate in lobbying activities in particular and the legislative process in general. www.cadca.org/resources/series/Strategizer

➤ **Influencing Policy Development—Community Toolbox at the University of Kansas**

This site has a variety of policy advocacy materials, plus many other related resources. According to the site, “The Community Toolbox at the University of Kansas has a comprehensive set of resources for policy work from the perspective of community organizations. The Toolbox is a global resource for free information on essential skills for building healthy communities. It offers more than 7,000 pages of practical guidance in creating change and improvement.” http://ctb.ku.edu/en/dothework/tools_tk_11.aspx

➤ **Y-PAR Hub**

YPAR (Youth-led Participatory Action Research) trains young people “to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them.” Their website has resources to help you do research on the issues you care about in your community. <http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/>

➤ **PlusAcumen**

Offers free and low-cost online courses to build skills that will help you create social change. www.plusacumen.org

➤ **DoSomething.org**

This website, which calls itself “a global movement for good,” helps connect young people to different ways to take action based on the issues they care about, the time they have available, and the kinds of action they want to do. www.dosomething.org/us

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John O'Connell High School	Focus Group Host	
SF LGBT Center	Focus Group Host	
Youth Art Exchange	Focus Group Host	

* Over 60 other youth participated in this project anonymously as either reviewers or focus group participants. To protect the anonymity of the youth who shared their stories, all of the names used in the text are pseudonyms. We thank all of the youth that contributed their time and expertise to this project.

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The Bigger Picture	The Bigger Picture is a collaboration between Youth Speaks and UCSF's Center for Vulnerable Populations designed to combat the rising epidemic of Type 2 diabetes by empowering youth to change the conversation about the disease, and work to change the social and environmental factors that have led to its spread.
The UCSF Center for Vulnerable Populations	The UCSF Center for Vulnerable Populations (CVP) at San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center is dedicated to improving health and reducing disparities through discovery, innovation, policy, advocacy, and community partnerships. The CVP seeks to develop effective strategies to prevent and treat chronic diseases in communities most at risk.
Youth Leadership Institute	YLI builds communities where young people and their adult allies come together to create positive social change.

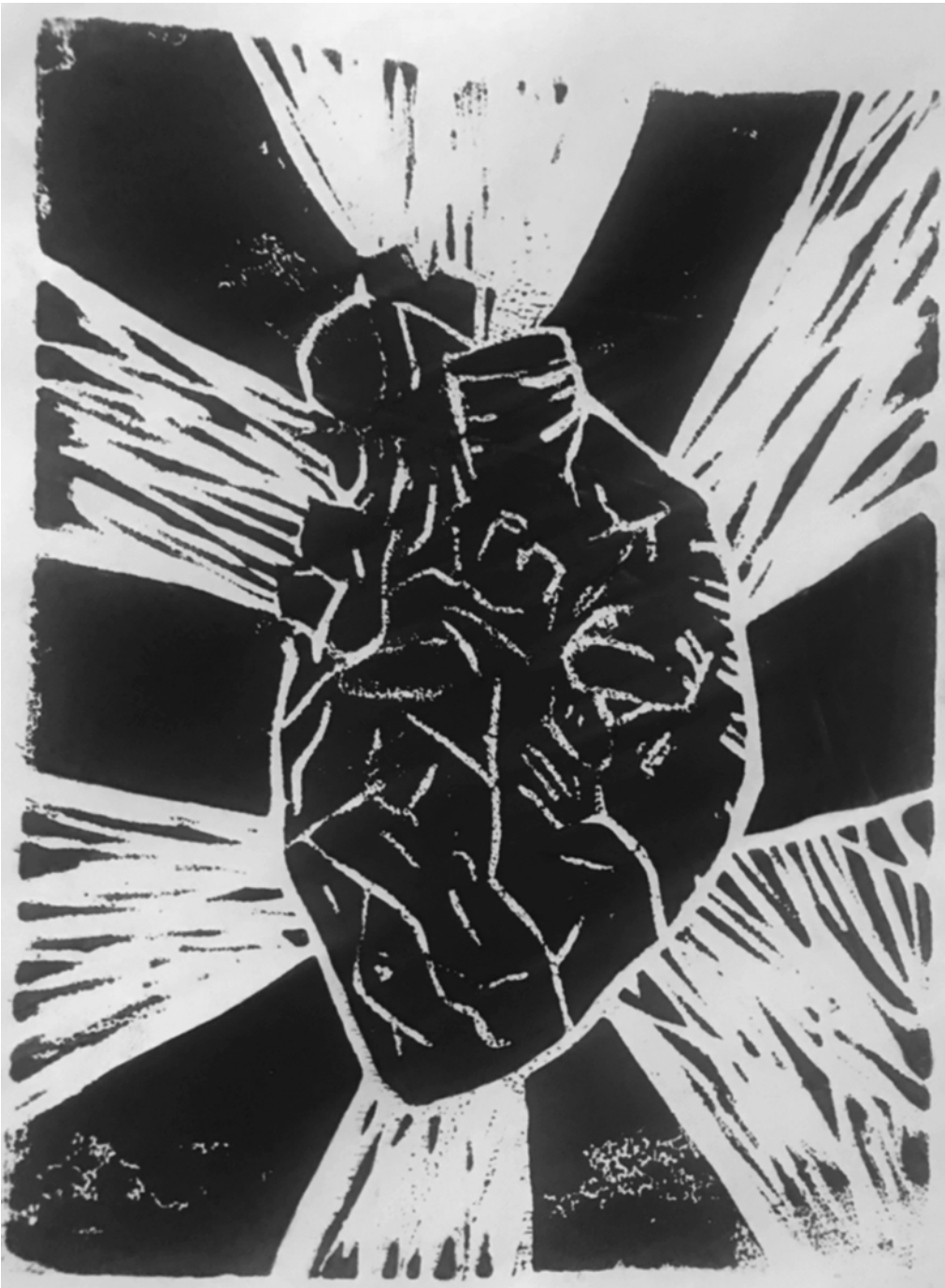
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Pathways to Policy Playbook

